

Are you ready to *change?*

Wanting to lose weight or quit smoking or step up your exercise routine are often resolutions made at the beginning of a new year. But the calendar is not the deciding factor. Your key to success is whether you're ready to make a change.

"Readiness to change is a big factor," said Meg Baker, director of the University of Alabama at Birmingham employee wellness. "Based on the stages of change model: precontemplation (unwilling to make a change), contemplation (considering lifestyle change), and action, you have to want to change your lifestyle to successfully improve your health."

To help prepare for any lifestyle change, Baker offers some tips:

- Develop small, short-term goals that will fit into your schedule. Make them realistic.
- Consider the benefits and reasons for the change.
- Talk to a family member, friend, or coworker about goals. Doing this can increase the likelihood of your staying committed to a new gym regimen or smoking cessation plan, and they may want to join you.

Baker said starting with small changes increases the likelihood of success. Find a form of exercise that you love, make small nutritional changes such as packing a lunch or cooking dinner at home. Use tracking systems and apps like those offered by the American Heart Association, Smokefree.gov, and the United States Department of Agriculture—or tap into your company's wellness programs.

