

Assessing readiness to change can begin an ongoing conversation between the clinician and the patient on lifestyle change. It is important that the discussion be nonjudgmental, empathetic, and encouraging, establishing a non-confrontational and supportive climate where the patient feels comfortable expressing both positive and negative aspects of their present behavior. It is an opportunity for the clinician to emphasize lifestyle as an important part of the patient's treatment plan. It allows the patient to assess how s/he feels about change and identify what is needed for success. It allows a discussion consistent with what information or assistance the patient wants and is able to use to achieve change. Information provided and goal setting can then be tailored to the patient's needs at that point in time.

Readiness to change is not static. It can change within your conversation with the patient. The goal is for the *patient* to express their desire, ability, barriers, and reasons to change. This discussion builds rapport between the clinician and patient to do the work of successful long-term lifestyle change.

**The Readiness Ruler is one tool that can help initiate this conversation.**

### Sample Question to Assess Readiness

Ask the patient: "On a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being not ready at all and 10 being ready to change today or already changing, how ready are you to change your food choices to help lower your cholesterol? Triglycerides? Weight?"

How ready are you?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Not ready Ready now/  
Already changing

### Sample Questions to Build on Readiness Response

- "Why a 5?"
- "Why a 5 and not a 2?"
- "What would need to be different to move you from a 5 to a 7 or 8?"

Use the discussion to begin a conversation, enhance confidence, and identify and address patients' barriers to change.

### Tailor the Conversation Based on Readiness

Rating of Patient Readiness	Goal of Conversation	Sample Responses to Evoke Change
0 to 3—Not ready for change	Raise awareness of reasons for change Facilitate considering change	What would need to happen for you to think about changing? How can I help? Would you be interested in knowing how _____ may help?
4 to 6—Unsure about change	Evaluate ambivalence Build readiness to change	What's the downside of taking action? What are the good things about staying the same? About changing? What would you have to give up to make this a priority?
7 to 10—Ready to change	Strengthen commitment to change Facilitate development of a realistic action plan	Why is it important to you? How might your life be different when you make the change? What are your ideas for _____? How might you do it? What information may help you move forward?

### Summarize and Set Appropriate Goals *with* the Patient

- Reflect back on the patient's strengths, positive thoughts, words, and actions that support positive change.
- Identify the patient's priorities, ask for permission to offer a menu of options, and support the patient's choice in what change he/she will work on.
- Define small steps the patient is likely to achieve, and have the patient set goals.
- Plan for follow-up. People may go back and forth in their interest and ability to change before making lasting change.