



Living well



**WELCOME
TO THE START
OF GREAT HEALTH**



They say the hardest part of change is actually making a start. The good news is that by choosing to participate in this health course you are well on your way! Congratulations on having the courage to learn more about your health and make positive changes to your lifestyle as a result. The most successful health outcomes are those that focus on all aspects of health: food and nutrition, exercise and fitness, mind and heart. This is whole person health, and is crucial to living well.

WHAT IS HEALTH?

True health means living a full and abundant life, free as much as possible from the burden of disease—it's about living more. The World Health Organisation agrees stating, "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."¹ Health is an underrated gift which we often take for granted, or worse still neglect or destroy it. That is, until we lose it.

WHY SHOULD I LEARN ABOUT HEALTH?

There is widespread agreement on the significance of good health, and improving the health of populations continues to be a major concern at local, national and international levels. So if we know we should be *healthy*, how do we start? Many people know the behaviours that signify good health—physical activity, healthy food choices, avoiding smoking etc., yet still find it difficult to implement those activities into their lives, all the while knowing *better*. There are many influences on our health: behavioural, environmental, socioeconomic, genetic and social. If knowledge is power, and this course is designed to assist you in making informed choices about your health, then it is up to you to take charge. Once you are well equipped at an intellectual level to understand whole person health, the choice of whether or not you apply that knowledge to your daily habits and choices is completely up to you.

"True health means living a full and abundant life—it's about living more."

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MY HEALTH?

This question is quite straightforward, and the answer is you—you are responsible for your own health. This is not to lessen the importance of supportive health professionals, nor the influence of our genes or unfortunate life experiences on our health—but ultimately, each day is influenced by the choices we make. Everyone can step closer towards health and happiness regardless of where they begin on the health journey. Ultimately, this gives us the ability to help control our quality of life.

Many people take the responsibility off themselves when it comes to their health. Sure, this is easier to deal with, but it is counterproductive. Seeing a medical practitioner when you are unwell is very important for treatment, but it may not help address the cause and prevent future occurrences. It is important to change your way of thinking from “It is the doctor’s job to fix me” to “What can I do to help prevent this happening again in the future?” At times this may not be appropriate, but more often than not there are some simple strategies that may help prevent illness occurring again.

When you take the responsibility of your own health into your hands, you will boost your feeling of wellbeing, satisfaction and enjoyment of life. There needs to be a greater emphasis on prevention of lifestyle diseases, rather than treatment when they are diagnosed. These diseases often occur as a consequence of a series of lifestyle choices and decisions that result in damaging your health. We live in a world where “A large burden of modern disease is currently being imposed by potentially lifestyle causes.”² Examples of lifestyle diseases include heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, lung cancer and type 2 diabetes.



"Lifestyle medicine focuses on recognising and treating the causes of disease, not just the symptoms."² It is a different way of looking at health. This course will not only give you information about chronic diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes etc., but it will also address lifestyle factors such as healthy eating, exercise and emotional wellbeing. Whole person health.

AM I READY TO CHANGE?

Making significant changes in life is not easy. When you weigh up any decision, most of us will look at the cost and benefit of the choices we can make. This can result in confusion, as there are normally both pros and cons to making a sustainable health change.

Values are the leading principles that guide and motivate us as we move through life. Values are statements about what we want to be doing with our life, about what we want to stand for, and how we want to be. We all live our lives by some kind of value system. However, the fact is most of us rarely sit down and take time to think about what is most important to us. We need to have our values clear in our minds so that we can be in control and make important life decisions. Clarifying your values gives a sense of freedom and is both an empowering and driving factor towards developing health goals and deciding on change.

Research indicates that success is correlated with where you sit along the continuum of readiness to change.³ Use the Stages of Behaviour Change model on page 10 to think and reflect on this for your own health goals.



Be well.



Goal setting

Anyone can set goals, but unless these goals are in line with your values then they are ineffective. Goals need to be SMART:⁴

SPECIFIC Defines what has to be achieved, by when and to what standard.

MEASURABLE Tells you how far you are away from your goal and when you achieve it.

ACHIEVABLE Provides a realistic path to achievement.

RELEVANT Relates to the objective.

TIMED Allocates sufficient time to progress and achieve your goals.

Once you have developed some goals, in order to take charge of your health it may be helpful to look at formulating some action steps and start thinking a little more about making your goals practical. Think about how you will remember to make the changes, what sort of things might get in your way, what your backup plan is, and who could support you as you work toward your goals. Make sure you are ready and supported at all steps before you begin.

STAGES OF BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

The Stages of Change Model was developed early in 1983 by James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente at the University of Rhode Island when they were studying how smokers were able to give up their habits or addictions.⁵ According to the Stages of Behaviour Change model, the following five steps make up the complex process a person uses to change their habits and behaviours and integrate changes into their lives.

1. PRE-CONTEMPLATION

People in this stage are not interested in change, nor can they see the need to change. They have no intention of doing anything differently. They may also defend their current behaviour and will not be persuaded otherwise.

2. CONTEMPLATION

People in this stage acknowledge that there is a problem but are not yet ready or sure of wanting to make a change. Sometimes there may be a trigger event that will place them in this stage, such as a parent getting sick. This is the time of weighing up the pros and cons as mentioned above.

3. PREPARATION

People in this stage are in the process of getting ready to change. They have usually realised how serious their situation is and have made a decision or a commitment to change. This is typically a period of transition. It is not seen as a stable time and is usually quite short in duration.

4. ACTION

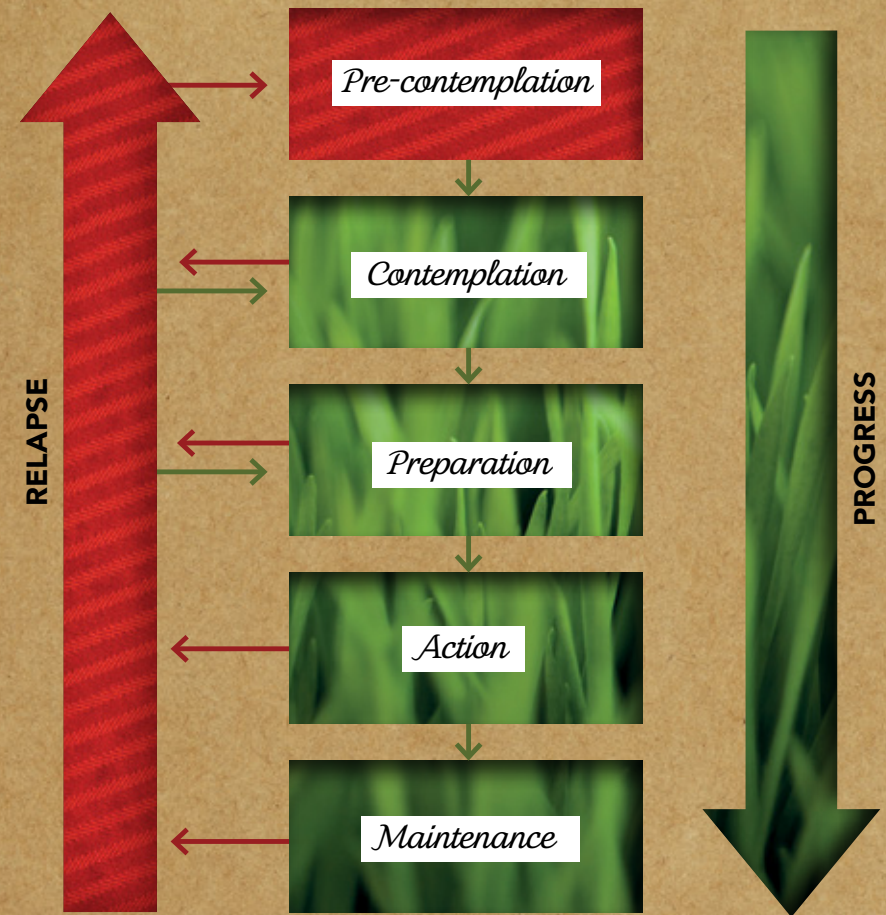
People in this stage have made real and overt changes or modifications to their lives and are starting to live their *new* life. While the chances of relapse and temptation are very strong, there is also openness to receiving help and support.

5. MAINTENANCE

People in this stage are working to consolidate any changes in their behaviour to maintain the *new* status quo and to prevent relapse or temptation. The former behaviour is no longer desirable and a number of coping strategies have been put in place and are working.

HOW CAN I WORK TO IMPROVE MY HEALTH?

Goals are the very things that provide fuel for our tank as we journey towards our optimal healthy lifestyle. Goals are the *why* behind the *what* of healthy lifestyle habits.



Live more!

Achieving good health is actually quite simple. Once you have accepted responsibility for your own health, understand your readiness to change, and have set out goals to improve various facets of your health, you are better equipped to achieve good health. The rest of this booklet introduces you to the crucial areas of health discussed over the remainder of the series.

HEALTHY EATING

Eating a balanced and varied diet is vital for living well. Food provides our bodies with energy, protein, essential fats, vitamins and minerals, to live, grow and function properly. It's important to choose the most nutritious foods possible to meet your needs. With more and more foods available in our food supply that tend to provide a large amount of energy for a small amount of nutrition, this is making it more difficult than ever. This is covered more in *Booklet 2—Good Eating*.

EXERCISE

More and more research is recognising incidental and planned activity, and decreased sedentary time as being important influences on our health.⁶ Western lifestyle has made inactivity a normal part of our lives. It is not uncommon for individuals to spend three or four hours a day commuting to work on top of eight or more hours sitting at a desk, as well as six to eight hours of sleep per day. This doesn't leave much time for movement, let alone planned physical activity, and is related to chronic disease. This is covered more in *Booklet 8—Moving Well*.

FLUID FACTS

We all know water is essential to life. Without it we as humans cannot survive. This is obviously essential to achieving good health.⁷ The human body is made largely of water, and excluding the water we drink we also get some from foods and other drinks. Not all fluids are created equal however. Beverages with added sugar, alcohol and caffeine should be limited. Read more about this in *Booklet 9—Less is More*, and *Booklet 10—Water & Sleep*.

SLEEP

Sleep researchers are discovering the importance of sleep for learning and memory, and the impact that a lack of sleep has on our health, safety, and longevity. In general, our society is burning the candle at both ends. We need to rethink how we prioritise sleep, as it is one of the basic building blocks of good health.⁸⁻¹⁰ Find out more about why sleep matters in *Booklet 10—Water & Sleep*.

SUNSHINE

We are all familiar with the *sun safe* message regarding protection from harsh UV rays in our climate using sunscreen, protective clothing etc. In Australia and New Zealand we have an abundance of sunlight to enjoy. Sunlight is also linked with vitamin D which is important for healthy bones,¹¹ as well as many other health benefits. You can read more about this in *Booklet 11—Sunshine & Bugs*.

HEALTHY MIND

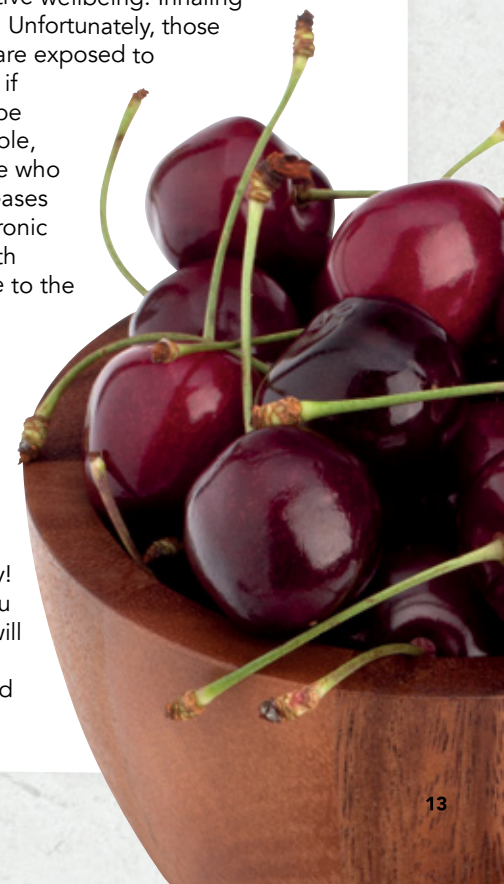
Around 20% of adults are affected by some form of mental disorder every year.¹² Good mental health is a vital part of overall health and wellbeing. It is just as important to maintain good mental health as it is to maintain good physical health. Emotions are deeply intertwined in all of our actions: what we eat, our exercise patterns, moods, relationships etc. These are all related to our emotional and mental wellbeing. Having a sense of purpose and belonging are important in order to enjoy life and feel good. Read more about this in *Booklet 12—Feeling Good*.

FRESH AIR

Fresh air contributes to good health and positive wellbeing. Inhaling fresh air nurtures almost every cell in our body. Unfortunately, those of us who live in the many cities of the world are exposed to pollution in the air that can damage our health if it becomes concentrated over time. This can be especially stressful for those who are susceptible, such as the young and elderly, as well as those who suffer with chronic pulmonary obstructive diseases (blocked arteries) such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Those who live in environments with poorer air quality should endeavour to escape to the great outdoors as often as possible.

MIND-BODY AWARENESS

The interaction between our mind and body is fascinating. It is important for good health that we are mindful of our choices and the daily habits that influence our health. Being more consciously aware, of our choices and actions can be difficult, as we often walk around on *auto-pilot*, but persistence and practice are key! When you become more consciously aware you apply intention and focus to your health, and will be much more present, engaged and aware of your health status as well as what you may need to address it. This is very powerful.



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Designed by Shelley Poole.
Course serviced by Adventist Media Network.
Course content provided by Sanitarium Health and Wellbeing, Australasian Research Institute and Sydney Adventist Hospital.

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You can
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LIVING WELL

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