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"Ch-Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes"

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Sometimes it will feel unsettling, but most of the time it will be exhilarating.

5. Maintenance: "I realize I need to work to keep the gains I've made." You struggle a bit now and then, but the new way progressively becomes a habit.

The "Aha!" Moment - Become creative about how to maintain the change. Ask others for ideas as well. They can be a great resource.

6. Termination: "I've reached my ultimate goal." The former behavior is no longer a threat. You are over it, and feel that you can cope without fear of a relapse. You've changed, won your struggle, and have exited the cycle of change - to live differently.

The "Aha!" Moment - It was well worth the effort! Celebrate.

As it's been said, "Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine"! Making self-improvements takes openness, the willingness to learn from both yourself and others, and some prioritizing. Armed with those, you have the best chance for success.

My next articles will address the issues of newly classified autoimmune diseases (the #3 cause of death in the U.S.) and how they are related to food sensitivities. Look for Parts I and II in the beginning of 2010. Since food is close to all our hearts, these steps of change will be worth remembering.

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The holidays are just around the corner and that means the "To Do" list will soon grow faster than the national debt. If you don't have the following items on your list yet, make space for the addition of "Personal Health and Wellbeing."

It's not too early to make health and wellbeing resolutions for next year. In fact, it's great timing because very often, change doesn't occur overnight. It follows an ordered sequence of steps. Recognizing this cycle can provide better self-understanding, catalyze the desired change, and even ease the frustration of loving others who need to change their self-destructive habits.

"Too many people look for solutions in the wrong places. There are no magic pills, potions or spells. Regardless of the bad habit that needs to change, everyone seems to go through the same stages." From his book "Changing for Good," psychologist James Prochaska states that there are 6 stages of change. Each stage carries both challenges and victories. I outline them here and include advice and insights at each step, called "Aha! Moments":

1. Precontemplation: "I don't have a problem." Everyone around you - friends, doctors, & co-workers can see it clearly, but you have no intention of changing.

The "Aha!" Moment - Realize that people care about you, and start admitting your defensiveness.

2. Contemplation: You're aware of the problem, and have begun to seriously think about solving it. You begin research. There may be simultaneous feelings of resistance and interest in the issue.

The "Aha!" Moment - "I want to stop feeling so stuck!" The frustration of this stage can provide the impetus for action. Use it to get to the next stage, which is:

3. Preparation: You've substituted worrying about it with working on it. You may quietly make slight adjustments but mostly be thinking "I'll take action next month (or after the holidays)."

The "Aha!" Moment - It's time to announce, "I will stop overeating Monday" and then do it. Tell only those that are supportive of you.

4. Action: "I've begun changing my behavior and surroundings." The desserts, cigarettes, alcohol, or whatever the bad habit is, is stopped, thrown away or poured down the drain. You make your move.

The "Aha!" Moment - Surroundings change when behavior changes.