

# Throw Out the Old, Ring in the New: Establishing New Habits

All of us have habits that we need to change or discard prior to taking on a new role in life, such as becoming a nurse. Your first step in making a change is to take inventory to see what habits you may need to change. Start by asking yourself what family members or friends have said about your habits: habits such as forgetfulness, disorganization or being highly emotional will follow you onto to the medical unit and negatively influence how you work. If you need to change a counterproductive habit, here is a 10-step method to help you throw out the old and bring in the new!

## **1. Identify a habit you want to change:**

Identify the specific habit(s) you want to change; if you identify two or three habits, choose the habit you feel most motivated to change; next reflect on how changing this habit will help you in your role as a nurse. This linkage may actually increase your motivation. For instance, disorganization, being easily overwhelmed or responding to others in a defensive manner, are all worthwhile considerations for change.

## **2. Take it one step at a time:**

While it is important to be motivated to change, it is also important to approach any change effort incrementally; to do otherwise may affect your success. For example, if you identify disorganization as the habit to change, choose one aspect of this behavior for your focus.

## **3. Develop an awareness of the thoughts that accompany this habit:**

Ask yourself, "What thoughts and associations do I have with this habit"? Does your old habit have this sense of inevitability to it? Perhaps it feels like an old friend that you must never give up, even though you have nothing in common anymore. Awareness can turn a light on to your unconscious and provide you with a stream of positive alternatives to your current habit.

## **4. Reflect on what it would mean to you to change this habit:**

Reflect on the specific thoughts that accompany this habit; notice if the habit is connected to a feeling of rebellion or a signature of your 'quirky' individuality. Habits that are counterproductive can be a very compelling part of your identity, even though the habit doesn't serve you well.

## **5. Create a picture of a new, more effective habit. Link your picture to your new role as a nurse:**

Imagine what it would be like to start your new position with a more effective replacement: perhaps you imagine yourself with less stress or an improved ability to make good decisions during a crisis.

## **6. Remind yourself of how your new habit will impact your role as a nurse:**

Next, record your responses as to how this new habit can make a big difference in your life; this activity may also feed a deeper motivation to make a desirable change.

**7. Interrupt the old habit when it emerges:**

Old habits die very hard; expect breakdowns along the way. The best way to interrupt an old habit is to create a little saying that can support you, such as, "No thanks, I don't need you anymore". Choose something that resonates for you, so that you can easily interrupt the old, familiar habit when it rears its persistent head!

**8. Reinforce the new behavior with a new thought process:**

Just like a new outfit needs a new pair of shoes, your new behavior needs a new thought process to support it; validate yourself with phrases like, "good job, I knew you could do it" or "I am so proud of you!" Give yourself a thumb's up; it is a great reinforcement for implementing a new habit.

**9. Reward yourself for the new behavior:**

Find meaningful ways to reward yourself for using your new habit. If one of the benefits of your new habit is saving time, use some of that extra time to do something that you love.

**10. Get lots of support:**

Be proactive and find others to support you in this process. Changing a behavior is not easy, so seeking support is best for success. Don't forget to choose your support carefully; the person who makes fun of you (and your bad habit) may not necessarily be the right person; find someone who truly can support a change that may, in fact, change you! Also, accessing books and articles that support behavior change can be an inspirational addition to your change effort.

Changing a behavior may not be easy, but it is possible. Entering a new, demanding career with a set of habits to support you is some of the best medicine for a new nurse.

*© 2007 SupportForNurses.com. This article is free to distribute provided the PDF is unchanged and these credits remain intact. For more articles, Tips Booklets and Nurses' Toolkits, please visit [www.supportfornurses.com](http://www.supportfornurses.com).*