



# Living Well with Dialysis: Motivating Yourself

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Whether you're new to dialysis or have been living with the routine for a while, it's easy to get stuck in a rut. Even if you feel like you have things under control, there might be areas of your routine that could use a reboot.

How do you know if you're stuck? One clue is to ask yourself if there are things you think are important that you're not doing. Maybe you have excellent eating habits, but don't exercise as much as you think you probably should. Maybe you never miss a dialysis appointment, but sometimes forget to take your pills.

When it comes to our health, few people do everything perfectly all the time. Most of us can find ways to do things a little bit better.

Unfortunately, you don't have control over the fact that you need dialysis. But you do have control over other aspects of your health. If you think of lifestyle changes as a long "to-do" list, they can easily feel overwhelming. But people who think of their sense of control as a gift are more likely to thrive.

Maybe you're ready to make changes today. Maybe you're just starting to think about making them in the future. Either





way, the first step to getting unstuck is to figure out why you're stuck. You may feel you don't have enough knowledge or information to make a change. Maybe you worry you don't have the skills or the support you need to do things differently. Maybe you're just not confident you can really change, and you're afraid to begin.

Once you understand your sticking points, consider sharing that information with your healthcare providers, psychologist, social worker, or other members of your treatment team. They can help you figure out the best ways to move beyond the logjam. Then you can start taking steps to tackle the goals that are important to you.

**Lay the groundwork.** Arm yourself with the tools you need before you start. Make sure you understand the medical reasons for making a change -- and how that change could help make your life better, both physically and emotionally. Enlist friends and family to support your lifestyle changes. If you believe something is important and you believe you can change it, you'll be more motivated to follow through.

**Think about what motivates you.** Some people make lifestyle changes in order to have more stamina or spend less time in the hospital. Some are motivated by the desire to see their grandkids grow up. Some just want to get their spouse to stop nagging them. It's helpful to make a list of pros and cons to clarify your reasons for making a change. Once you understand what you have to gain from a change, it's easier to make it happen.

**Figure out what strategies work for you.** You probably have a lot of experts in your life: physicians, nurses, dieticians, social workers, therapists. But you're the expert on you. Think about what works best to motivate you. Maybe you need people to check in with you frequently and hold you accountable.

Maybe you need rewards to encourage you to stick to your goals. Maybe you hate being told what to do -- or maybe you appreciate helpful suggestions. As you collaborate with healthcare providers and family members to set goals, it often helps to keep in mind that what works for other people might not work for you.

**Set clear goals.** When setting goals, experts recommend stating them in concrete, positive terms. "I'll exercise more" is a vague goal that's hard to achieve. It's almost always more effective to set specific terms for the goal, such as "I'll take a 20-minute walk each day." Instead of just saying you'll cut down on sweets, you might set a goal limiting yourself to, say, two desserts a week. The more specific you can be, the better.

**Start low and go slow.** When you make healthy lifestyle changes, it can be tempting to set big goals. For some people, big goals are inspirational. Usually, though, it's easier for people to break big goals into smaller steps. It can take time to establish a new habit, and the more we practice, the better we get. Think about setting a small, realistic target -- even something as minor as eating one extra serving of vegetables each day. Once that goal becomes a habit, it's easier to layer on new changes. You don't have to overhaul your life all at once to make progress toward a goal. Small steps can add up to big effects. By taking time to understand what's really important to you, and what steps will work best to lead you there, you'll set yourself up for success.

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