

5 Myths About Changing Behavior

Reality: Ninety percent of patients who've had coronary bypasses don't sustain changes in the unhealthy lifestyles that worsen their severe heart disease and greatly threaten their lives.

Myth: Change is motivated by fear

Reality: It's too easy for people to go into denial of the bad things that might happen to them. Compelling, positive visions of the future are a much stronger inspiration for change.

Myth: The facts will set us free

Reality: Our thinking is guided by narratives, not facts. When a fact doesn't fit our conceptual "frames" -- the metaphors we use to make sense of the world -- we reject it. Also, change is inspired best by emotional appeals rather than factual statements.

Myth: Small, gradual changes are always easier to make and sustain

Reality: Radical, sweeping changes are often easier because they quickly yield benefits.

Myth: We can't change because our brains become "hardwired" early in life

Reality: Our brains have extraordinary "plasticity," meaning that we can continue learning complex new things throughout our lives -- assuming we remain truly active and engaged.