

TABLE 4

Stages of Change and Their Implications for Counseling²⁰

STAGE OF CHANGE	CHARACTERISTIC(S) OF CLIENT	INTERVENTION
Precontemplation	Unaware of the need to change and has no intention to change in the next six months	Focus on raising consciousness and self-awareness.
Contemplation	Aware of the issue and plans to change, but not soon	Assess the patient's knowledge, thoughts, values, and beliefs during this stage to understand barriers to change.
Preparation	Motivated to make changes within the next 30 to 60 days	Promote self-efficacy and commitment making in the patient and encourage decision making and goal setting.
Action	Currently making attempts to change by modifying food choices, behaviors, and other factors*	Encourage self-management and self-reinforcement; help patients find social support and self-manage.
Maintenance	Have maintained behavior changes for six months—however, they are highly vulnerable to relapse and need continual effort to maintain their change(s)	Provide periodic support to help the client cope, keep commitments, and avoid relapse.
Termination	Have maintained changes for five years	Encourage self-management and self-efficacy.

*Despite how they may talk or behave, clients often are not in the action stage when they first meet with an RD. Rather, they're often in the earlier stages of the model.

Because each stage of change requires a different approach, RDs must pay close attention to patients' spoken and unspoken messages through motivational interviewing techniques to ascertain their clients' positions on the model. With this vital information, RDs can tailor their counseling to meet the clients' needs.