WebMD HEALTH SERVICES

WebMD Health Coaching: An Evidence-Based Approach For Success

A White Paper

The success of health coaching as an intervention lies in its personalization. Each session must be fully participant focused, taking into consideration the individual's health risks, readiness to change, environment, preferences, and other factors to create a plan for change that works for that individual. Whereas coaching sessions will always be unique, health coaching as a discipline must be practiced in a consistent way to deliver reliable and positive outcomes, call after call.

WebMD has taken an evidenced-based approach to health coaching in every aspect:

- **Health Coach Background:** Matching Expertise to Need
- **Health Coach Training:** A Foundation for Excellence
- **Coaching in Practice:** WebMD Coaching Methodology
- **Coaching Quality:** Rigorous Evaluation for Unsurpassed Standards

WebMD Health Coach Certifications

ACE – American Counsel on Exercise Advanced Health and Fitness Specialist

ACSM HFS – American College of Sports Medicine Health Fitness Specialist

ACSM RCEP – American College of Sports Medicine Registered Clinical Exercise Physiologist

Advanced Cardiac Life Support

American Cancer Society FreshStart

Certified Spanish Interpreter

CHES – Certified Health

Education Specialist

CPR, First Aid, Basic Life Support

Diabetes Management

Distance Certified Counselor

EMT Emergency Response

Health Cost Management

LMHC – Licensed Mental Health Counselor

NCC – National Certified Counselor

NSCA – National Strength and Conditioning Association

RD – Registered Dietitian

RN – Registered Nurse

Smoking Cessation Facilitator

TTS – Tobacco Treatment Specialist

WellCert – WebMD Health Services and National Wellness Institute

Wellcoach

Health Coach Backgrounds: Matching Expertise To Need

In addition to its well-known and well-respected online offerings, WebMD offers a human side of health improvement. Our more than 130 health coaches have worked one-on-one with hundreds of thousands of participants over 13 years to find their motivation and improve their lifestyle habits. Every day, WebMD health coaches help individuals set personal goals, take steps toward change, and take control of their health and well-being. Positive behavior change can lead to lower healthcare costs, higher productivity, and fewer missed days of work – outcomes that benefit participants, their families, and their program sponsors.

WebMD has built our staff of skilled health coaches by matching expertise to need. Four of the top five risk factors of our coaching participants are diet, weight, physical inactivity, and high blood pressure. To respond to those risks, most of our coaches have a dietetics, exercise science, or kinesiology background and are organized into cross-specialty teams. Stress and emotional health are other top risk factors, and we match our stress and mental health specialists to participants who can benefit from their knowledge.

All WebMD health coaches have earned a four-year degree in a health science or health promotion field, and a significant number have earned a master's degree. More are pursuing advanced degrees through our tuition reimbursement program. Other areas of study include community health, health science, nursing, public health, and others. This range of backgrounds ensures that our staff has the expertise to address the full spectrum of health risks and needs of a large participant population, from common lifestyle changes such as increasing physical activity, to more focused needs, such as eating well after cancer treatment.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND CERTIFICATIONS

In addition to their education, health coaches have built their knowledge through professional experience – averaging nearly five years in the health and wellness field – and certification programs. Our health coaches hold many clinical and professional licenses and certifications, including registered nurse (RN), registered dietitian (RD), tobacco treatment specialist (TTS), certified health education specialist (CHES), certified Wellcoach, stress specialist, and licensed mental health specialist. In addition, 100 percent of our coaches have earned American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) certification.

WebMD sponsors many annual certification programs for our health coaches to help build their knowledge and skills and to earn continuing education credits to maintain certifications. Onsite programs include motivational interviewing training and certification with a Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT) instructor, the tobacco treatment specialist (TTS) certification program from the University of Massachusetts, and the WellCert Certification Program – a program from WebMD and the National Wellness Institute for skill development in planning, executing, and evaluating worksite wellness programs.

PERSONALITY AND UNDERSTANDING

Health knowledge is only part of the picture. To help someone change an engrained behavior such as smoking takes more than a health degree. Our health coaches go beyond mastering health as a science, to understanding health as a behavior. The skill sets required to instruct compliance with a treatment plan and guide behavior change – although both are important – are vastly different. Health coaches help individuals place value on health, address ambivalence to change, set goals, own actions, build supportive environments and networks, overcome obstacles, and celebrate successes.

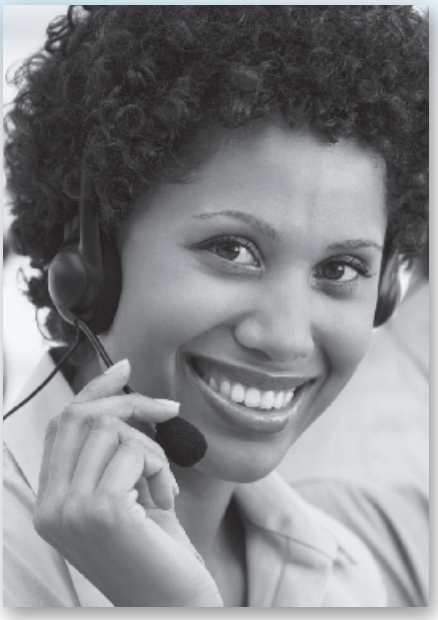
The therapeutic bond between professional and individual is key to catalyzing behavior change. Beyond education and training, our health coaches possess attributes that help coaching participants feel respected, empowered, and personally responsible for their goals and actions. Our rigorous screening process includes a personality analysis that can demonstrate health coaching success. Health coaches are the professionals best suited to guide participants toward lasting lifestyle change because of their unique combination of health knowledge and change facilitation skills. WebMD coaches have the education, experience, and personal characteristics to help our clients' populations be successful in their efforts to improve health.

Health Coach Training: A Foundation For Excellence

WebMD provides comprehensive internal training through our WebMD Health Services Training and Learning Center. Upon hire, new coaches participate in an onsite, classroom-based training that emphasizes application and interactivity. We focus on the behavioral science and techniques that underlie the WebMD model of health coaching. We also provide information specific to WebMD's programs, clients, and systems, including the case management system used to record details from each coaching session.

Along with this training program, new coaches listen to recorded coaching calls and partner with an experienced health coach for side-by-side observation of live coaching calls. During this time, they learn about the clinical SOAP – Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan – notes that are used to document coaching sessions. Trained coaches are evaluated before speaking with program participants to ensure that they are prepared to perform their roles with confidence and excellence.

The Training and Learning Center also provides ongoing health coach training. Workshops, lunchtime sharing sessions, and mentoring are available to review or introduce new concepts and skills, as well as online, self-paced training. All training is built on the tenets of adult learning, emphasizing goal-oriented education that is highly interactive and relevant to the daily practice of health coaching.

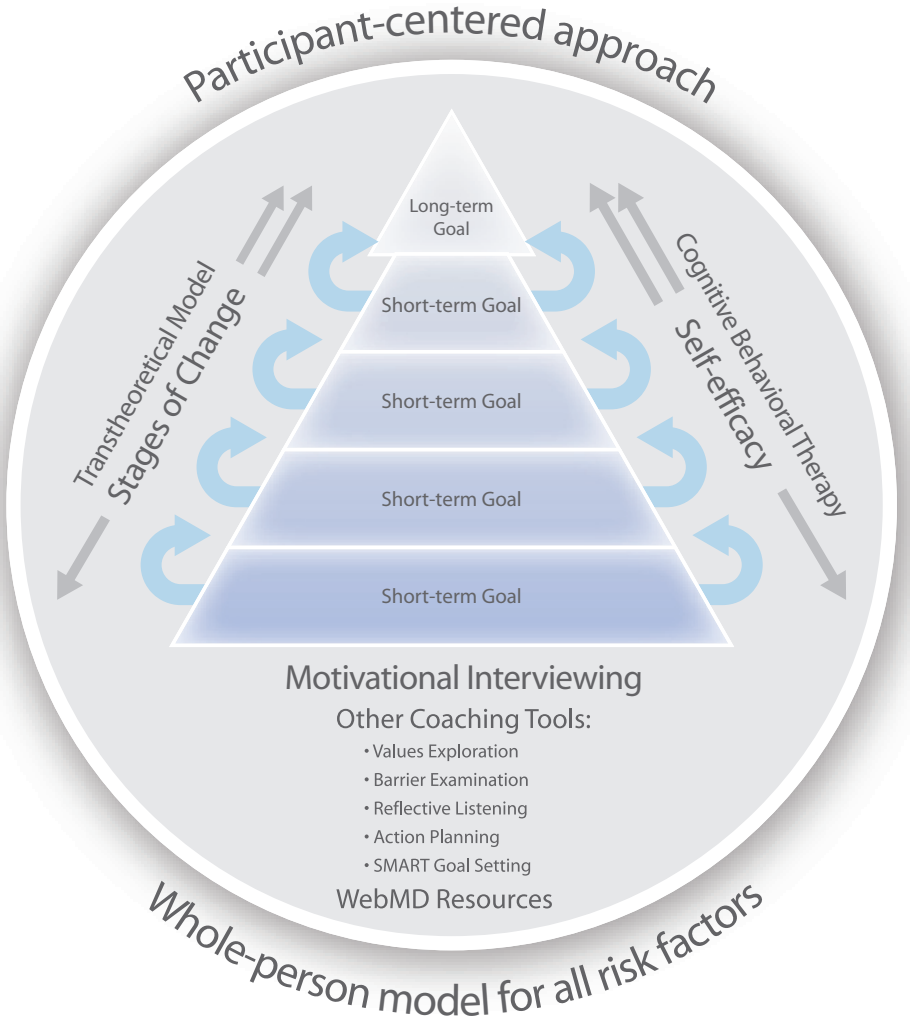


COACHING IN PRACTICE: WEBMD COACHING METHODOLOGY

Our model of health coaching is a participant-centered, whole-person approach to behavior change. Using motivational interviewing (MI) and other skills, our coaches help participants increase readiness and gain confidence to make lasting changes for improved health.

BEHAVIORAL METHODS

As participants set short-term goals and work toward their long-term goals, they move through the stages of change as described in the transtheoretical model of behavior change.[1] This is not a linear process, but participants gain confidence in their ability to change as they set and achieve manageable goals. The belief that they can perform a behavior to attain a particular goal is their self-efficacy.[2] Self-efficacy can be increased through a cognitive behavioral approach.[3] With the help of their health coach using cognitive behavioral strategies such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, setting realistic expectations, and finding support, participants continue to gain confidence in their ability to change throughout the coaching program.



WHOLE-PERSON APPROACH

Our whole-person approach to health coaching takes all of an individual's health risks and conditions into consideration. Approximately 14 percent of our high-risk coaching program participants and nine percent of our moderate-risk group report living with at least one chronic condition. Health coaches support their needs by encouraging treatment plan adherence, healthy lifestyle habits, and self-care. For those with uncontrolled conditions, health coaches can help to resolve ambivalence toward prescribed treatment and appropriate follow-up with healthcare providers. As part of the continuum of care, our health coaches also link participants with useful partner programs such as disease management or employee assistance programs, organizations, and other client-provided resources through referrals and warm transfers.

BROAD ENGAGEMENT

WebMD's broad engagement model, in which we work with individuals who are ready to make a behavior change as well as those who express that they may not yet be ready to change, is a strength of our coaching program. The stages-of-change framework was developed to guide practitioners in how best to communicate with people at different levels of readiness, not as a criterion for program qualification. Indeed, health coaching is effective and valuable to individuals at every stage of readiness. In a multi-client study covering 14,392 of our coaching participants we found the following:

- Few people are completely unwilling to change any of their risks. A person may be unwilling to quit smoking, but that does not mean he or she is unwilling to eat better. We found that 81 percent of our engaged population were ready to change a behavior.
- Our coaching effectively helps "unready" people to change. We analyzed net risk changes for people at a lower readiness to change for all of their at-risk behaviors. We found that they actually had greater health risk improvements in six of the 11 risk areas we studied, in comparison to people who indicated that they were at a higher stage of readiness to change.
- There is equally significant medical cost savings per year for people who are highly ready to change and those who are less ready. When we examined financial impacts, we found that the less-ready population demonstrated an estimated $484 in annual medical costs savings. In comparison, the high-readiness population demonstrated a $469 savings annually.
- Even when people do not improve risks, they increase readiness to change. When we analyzed the subset of people who did not improve their risks, we found a net increase of 5.67 percent of people moving into the action and maintenance categories. This suggests greater opportunity for ongoing health improvement in a population in year two, and over time.

Assessment Tool Designed To Evaluate Health Coaching Practices

WebMD is the only health coaching organization to measure motivational interviewing-based coaching quality using a unique hybrid of measures from the two validated tools for measuring MI proficiency: the Behavior Change Counseling Index (BECCI)[6] and the Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity (MITI)[7] Code. In addition to evaluating MI proficiency, the assessment evaluates coach performance in setting SMART goals – specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, and timely; providing relevant resources to participants; and giving accurate client-based wellness program information during their calls.

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Motivational interviewing (MI) forms the foundation of WebMD health coaching. MI is a collaborative form of guiding to elicit and strengthen motivation for change.[4] MI-based health coaching is the only method that has been shown to be causally and independently associated with positive behavioral outcomes.[5]

"Sometimes the most powerful thing you can say is nothing at all." This was a takeaway from a lunchtime sharing session on MI. With an MI-based approach, health coaches ask open-ended questions and listen attentively to participants' responses. Coaches then reflect back what they've heard – placing emphasis on positive statements made by the participant and encouraging further exploration of those thoughts. The positive conversation threads are called "change talk," in MI terminology. A coach works to elicit change talk from the participant during a coaching session.

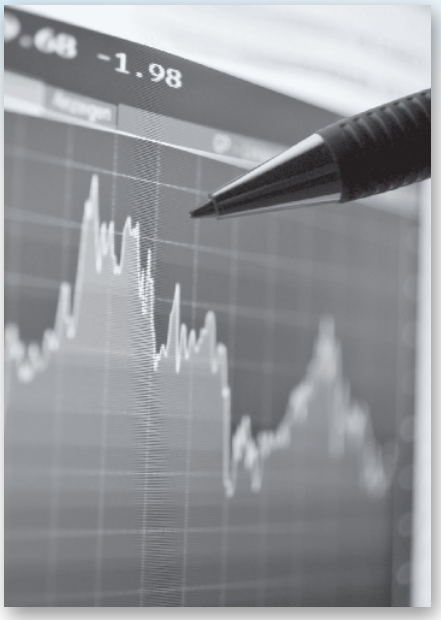
Change talk must come from the participant; health coaches avoid directing someone to change, but instead collaboratively guide individuals in making their own decisions about how and why to change. When a participant is truly stuck, however, a health coach can ask permission to make a suggestion based on his or her expertise.

A Health Coach Explains "Change Talk"

"When someone is describing a situation to me, it is like they are dealing me cards. Each statement is a card from their deck. I sort the deck into positive and resistant statements and hand the participant back the cards that represent the most positive things they've said. These might be statements about why they want or need to change, their commitment to change, or what steps they've taken toward change."

What happens when there is not one positive card to hand back, however? That is when some practitioners might draw on their expert knowledge to present the "right" answer to the individual. Coaches need to "resist the righting reflex," in MI terminology, and wait for the participant to find his or her own words.

"We as coaches cannot pull out our own cards – we have to play with the participant's deck. By asking additional questions, it's amazing that the participant will almost always come up with an ace that they'd been holding on to. When the participant has come up with the idea – the change talk – that is really powerful."



COACHING QUALITY: RIGOROUS EVALUATION FOR UNSURPASSED STANDARDS

WebMD is an outcomes-driven organization. Just as our health coaches are thoroughly prepared for success through training and ongoing support, they are rigorously evaluated in their practice and performance. WebMD has made unique contributions to quality management in health coaching. In coordination with Susan Butterworth, Ph.D., a leading researcher in the area of health coaching, WebMD developed, pilot tested, and put into practice a tool to evaluate telephonic health coaching sessions. The tool is designed to measure call quality as well as the proficiency and performance of health coaches in a client-centered approach. The tool not only ensures that coaches are proficient in their practice, but that a consistent methodology is used during sessions.

One hundred percent of our coaching calls are recorded for quality assurance. Each month, health coaches receive one-on-one feedback from our quality assurance managers on four randomly selected calls that are evaluated using our rubric. Five additional calls are selected for the specific evaluation of goals. Goals must be appropriate to the participant's stage of change and SMART (see graphic). Call scores are funneled into a scorecard that provides a longitudinal look at health coach performance. Score breakdown by area is also used as a mechanism for planning ongoing coach training.

HIGHEST QUALITY COACHING FROM WEBMD: A LEADER IN HEALTH INFORMATION AND EVIDENCED-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Our strong evidence base drives the efficacy of our coaching program, and our outcomes measures demonstrate the success of individuals in our coaching programs and the return on investment realized by our clients.

With the emphasis today on prevention, wellness, and the transition of healthcare decision-making to consumers, WebMD Health Services is uniquely positioned to help individuals and organizations meet health and healthcare goals. In addition to our coaching program, which incites health behavior change, our private portal applications aid decision making about physicians, hospitals, treatments, and medications. They make it easy to keep an important personal health record of all visits, tests, and procedures. And they facilitate understanding on how lifestyle choices affect health and well-being – making a strong link between preventative efforts and healthcare needs.

When individuals are actively engaged in changing lifestyle behaviors toward improving their overall health and well-being, they can rely on WebMD to support their progress. And as organizations work toward reduced healthcare costs, WebMD can help improve population health, one individual at a time.

Contact Us Today

For more information about WebMD Health Services, contact us at WHSinfo@webmd.net or visit webmdhealthservices.com.

Personal Guidance. Positive Change.

2701 NW Vaughn Street, Suite 700, Portland, Oregon 97210 | www.webmdhealthservices.com

Sources

1. Prochaska JO, DiClemente CC. (1984). The Transtheoretical Approach: Crossing traditional boundaries of therapy. Homewood, Illinois: Dow/Jones Irwin.

2. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychological Review, 84, 191-215.

3. Sallit J, Ciccazzo M, Dixon Z. A Cognitive-behavioral weight control program improves eating and smoking behaviors in weight-concerned female smokers. Journal of the American Dietetic Association. 2009; 109:1398-1405.

4. Miller WR, Rollnick S. Ten things that motivational interviewing is not. Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy. 2009; 37: 129-140.

5. Butterworth SW, Linden A, McClay W. Health Coaching as an Intervention in Health Management Programs. Disease Management Health Outcomes. 2007; 15: 299-307.

6. Lane C, Huws-Thomas M, Hood K, et al. Measuring adaptations of motivational interviewing: the development and validation of the Behavior Change Counseling Index (BECCI). Patient Education and Counseling. 2005; 56: 166-73.

7. Moyers TB, Martin T, Manuel JK, et al. Motivational interviewing treatment integrity manual (unpublished manuscript 2005) [online]. Available from URL: http://motivationalinterview.org/training/index.html.

WebMD is a registered trademark, WebMD Lifestyle Improvement Programs is a service mark of WebMD Health Services Group, Inc. ©2010WebMD Health Services Group, Inc. All rights reserved. This document may not be copied in any form without written permission from WebMD Health Services Group, Inc. Information in this document subject to change without notice.

10167 09/10