

The Struggle is Real:



Everyone knows that getting in shape, reducing stress, or quitting an unhealthy habit will help you feel better and live longer. So why don't we just do it? If you've ever tried to make a change, you know it's not that simple.

Behavioral scientists have identified nine common barriers that often stand in the way of good intentions—and results. By understanding these barriers, you can put yourself in a better position to overcome them and create new healthy habits that stick around for good.

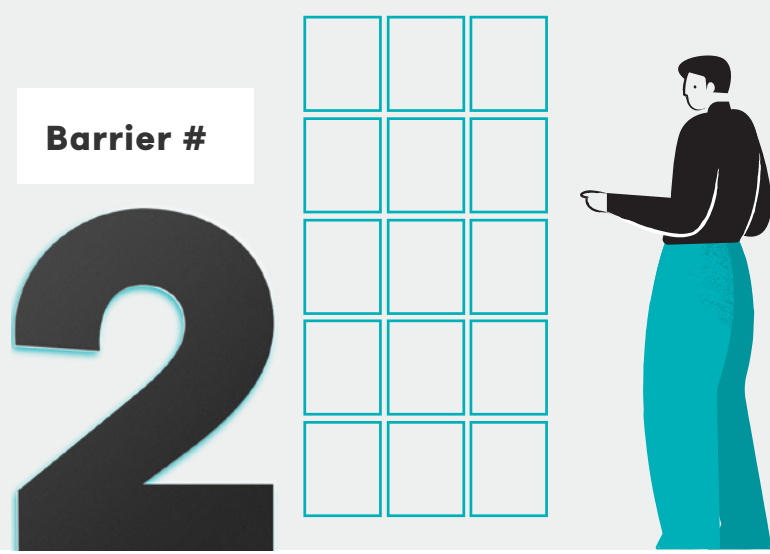
Here's what you need to know.

The 9 Barriers to Behavior Change



Barrier #1 The barrier of overlooking context

As human beings, we are all unique. We have different starting points and strategies when it comes to our health and wellbeing journeys. That means a "one-size-fits-all" approach that uses templated advice, technology, or products likely won't work for many people that try them. For example, one study that compared weight loss strategies found that the personalized plan achieved more than 2x greater weight loss than a standardized plan.¹

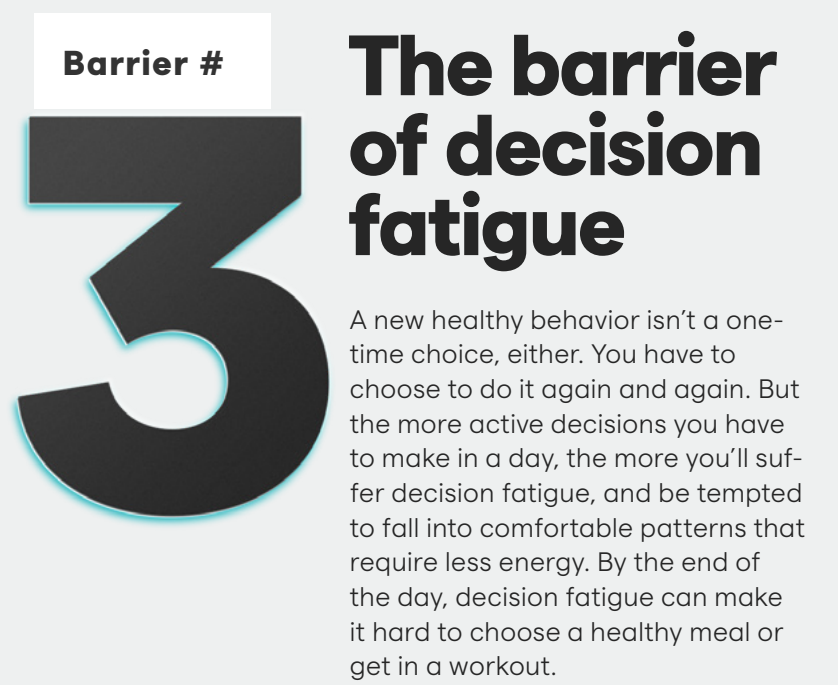


Barrier #2 The barrier of choice overload

When trying to improve our health and wellbeing, there are a seemingly infinite number of activities, strategies, books, podcasts, articles, videos and other resources to choose from for help. With so many choices, it's easy to get overwhelmed and choose nothing at all.

Here's an example of choice overload in action: one study found that when people are faced with too many choices, they have:

- less physical stamina
- reduced persistence in the face of failure
- more procrastination²



Barrier #3 The barrier of decision fatigue

A new healthy behavior isn't a one-time choice, either. You have to choose to do it again and again. But the more active decisions you have to make in a day, the more you'll suffer decision fatigue, and be tempted to fall into comfortable patterns that require less energy. By the end of the day, decision fatigue can make it hard to choose a healthy meal or get in a workout.

35k
The number of decisions the average American makes per day³

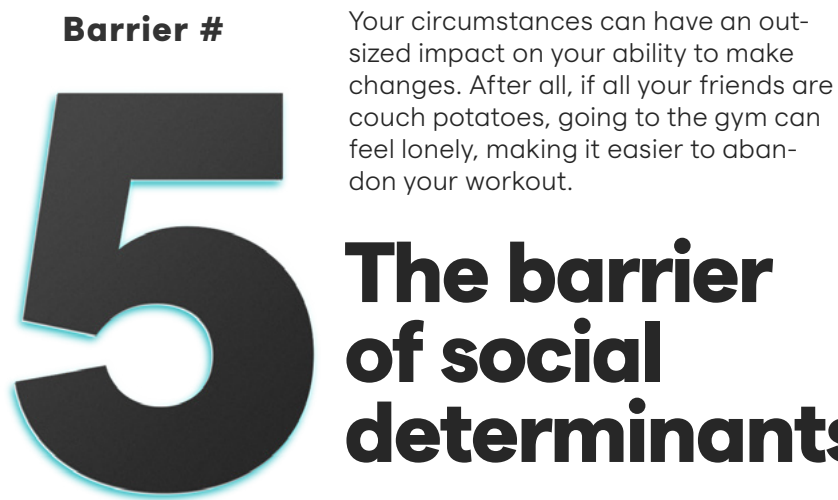
32%
The percentage of adults that report still being so overwhelmed by the pandemic's effects that they struggle to make even basic decisions, such as what to wear or eat.⁴



Barrier #4 The barrier of old habits

Not only is making a healthy choice hard, but you also have to choose to avoid your old, unhealthy habit. Old habits are deeply ingrained in both your mind and body—"muscle memory" even exists at a DNA level.⁵ Because of that, it's often easier to revert to the old habit rather than spending the energy to make two decisions—one to do the healthier choice and one to not do the unhealthy choice.

40%
The percent of actions people perform in a day that aren't decisions at all, but habits—things done on autopilot.⁶



Barrier #5 The barrier of social determinants

Your circumstances can have an out-sized impact on your ability to make changes. After all, if all your friends are couch potatoes, going to the gym can feel lonely, making it easier to abandon your workout.

And if you lack access to nutritious food, making a healthy eating decision is even more difficult.

12.8%
US residents who live in a food desert⁷

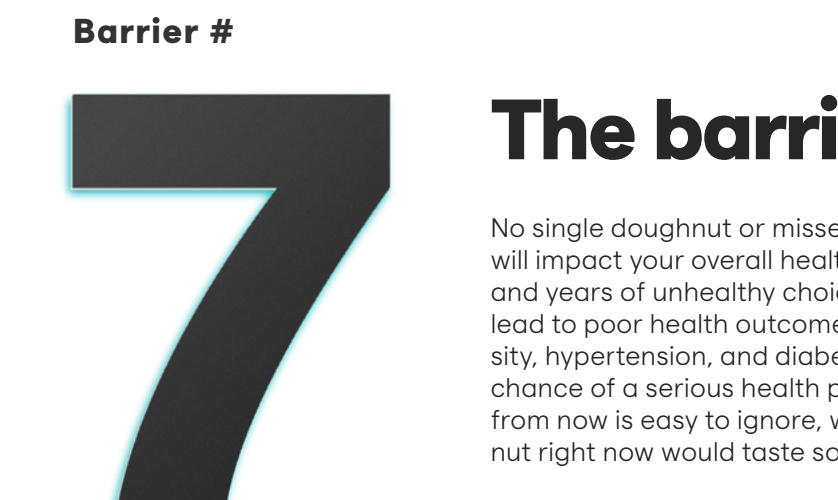
43%
People worldwide who lack the income to afford a healthy diet⁸



Barrier #6 The barrier of incremental progress

Once you change a behavior, it can take weeks or months to see the impact. That makes it difficult to know if what you're doing is working, leading to understandable frustration—and maybe even the urge to give up. However, studies show that it's slow and steady that wins the race.

51.5 mins per day
Reduction in sitting time thanks to an incremental goal-setting intervention program⁹



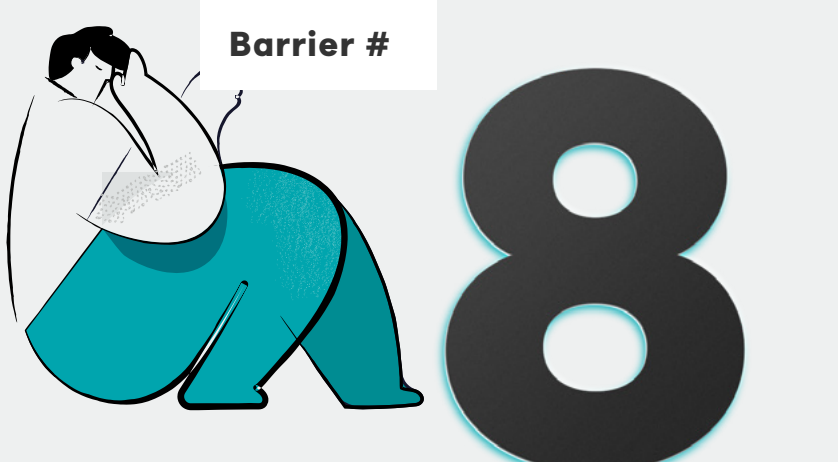
Barrier #7 The barrier of choice overload

No single doughnut or missed workout will impact your overall health. It's months and years of unhealthy choices that can lead to poor health outcomes like obesity, hypertension, and diabetes. But the chance of a serious health problem years from now is easy to ignore, while a doughnut right now would taste so good, right?

This preference for immediate, small rewards over a larger, long-term reward—called hyperbolic discounting—often stands in the way of making the healthy choice.

Dozens of studies show that smokers, illicit drug users, and problem drinkers all

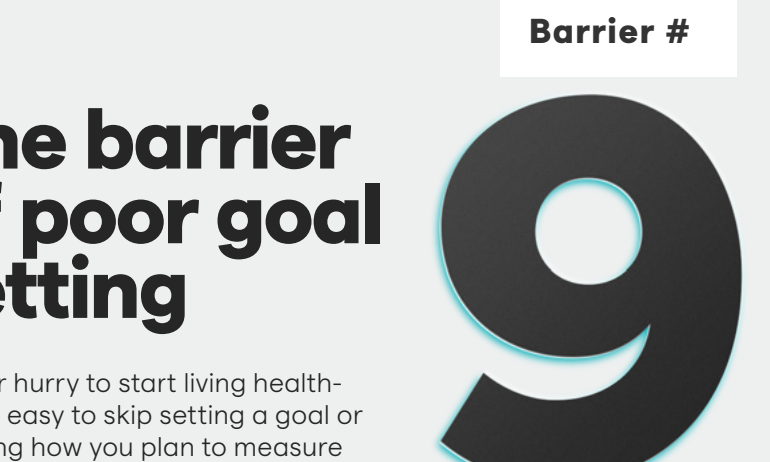
discount hypothetical future monetary rewards compared to control groups.¹⁰



Barrier #8 The barrier of relapse

Behavior change is not just a destination, but a journey. And every journey has a few bumps in the road. However, when you experience a lapse, such as a missed workout or unhealthy meal, it can erode your confidence in your overall ability to change. Studies show that relapse should be an expected phase of behavior change, not a sign of failure.

96.4%
People who lost significant weight that have experienced small re-gains¹¹



Barrier #9 The barrier of poor goal setting

In your hurry to start living healthier, it's easy to skip setting a goal or defining how you plan to measure success. Even if you do, your goal might be too fuzzy or hard to measure, making it difficult to know once you've reached it. This can lead to discouragement because you haven't reached an undefined goal, even if you're making good progress.

6.9 points
Improvements in Alternate Healthy Eating Index score within three months of setting a fruit and/or vegetable goal compared with those who did not.¹²

There's no secret to good health. It's all about making better choices every day to eat healthier, get active, get better sleep, and reduce stress. But by understanding the barriers that can get in the way of making healthy changes, you can recognize and overcome them instead of getting stuck.

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