

HOW TINY CHANGES TO YOUR EATING CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE



What do we know already?

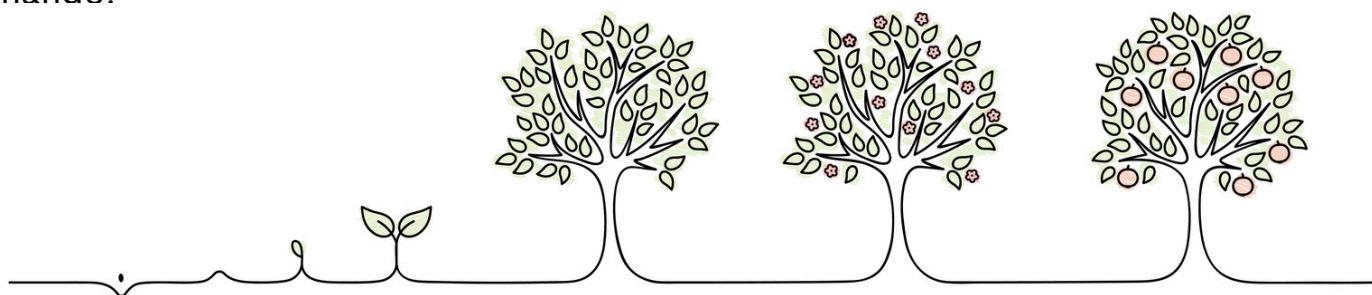
Most of us know that eating well, sleeping better, keeping active and reducing stress is important for our physical, emotional and social wellbeing. If you live with persistent pain you may have considered that making healthy lifestyle changes and forming new habits and behaviours could help with your experience of pain and restore quality of life.

What stops us from making changes?

Why is it sometimes difficult to make the changes that we'd like to, or that we think could help with managing pain? One thing may be that we're constantly being bombarded with differing or contradictory diet or health messages (e.g. on TV and social media and from health care professionals, well-intended friends and family members). It can also just be that our busy lives get in the way of finding the time and energy to make changes we'd like to.

The difference between being told to change and deciding to change

Another thing is that most people don't like being told what to do. Consider for a moment if someone said, for example, "Your breakfast choice is unhealthy and from tomorrow you must have porridge every morning for 2 weeks". How would you feel? What emotions would surface? Now, think about how you'd feel if you decided "I'm going to try and have porridge for breakfast for the next 2 weeks instead of a fry up, because I know I'll feel better for it". In example 1, where someone's telling you to make a change, you might feel annoyed or frustrated but in example 2, when you'd chosen to make the change, you might feel motivated and happy for having made this plan. The point is, both of these examples are about eating a healthier breakfast, but there is a huge difference between the two sets of emotions felt, and a far greater chance of success in example 2, where you have chosen to make the tiny change.



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RETHINKING
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What if you have decided to make a tiny change?

In relation to what we eat, drink and our health, we might know something would be better for us, but find it's easier to want to make a habit change than it is to actually plan, prepare and stick to it - and that's okay! We're only human, and it's normal and natural to worry that making a change will take time or could be difficult. When you've decided to make a tiny change, there is then the practical step of putting your intention and motivation into action and making that change part of your everyday life by forming new habits.

Why is planning to make your tiny change important?

A common reason for feeling it will be difficult to make a change, is that when people plan to make changes, they often decide on something far too big, making the change a mountain to climb! For example, a person who is not very active decides, "I'm going to start walking 3kms, everyday". This is a big lifestyle change! and is therefore likely to be unachievable and feel overwhelming. By setting the bar too high, most people are setting themselves up to fail. That's why we want to get you thinking differently by encouraging you to make tiny, manageable changes to your diet or lifestyle so that you can achieve long-term changes that are important and personal to you. If we set ourselves up to succeed, we have more chance of being able to stick to those changes in the long run, and see the benefits they bring.

How can our Diet Therapy workshops and support help you?

On the Rethinking Pain 'Diet Therapy' webpages we are encouraging and supporting you to make tiny food and drink changes that won't be too hard to achieve and that you can easily build into your daily routine. These are tiny changes that can bring you big benefits, like easing pain, improving sleep and mood, reducing risk of developing health conditions and improvement in quality of life.

What's next?

It's up to you to decide on the tiny changes you want to make, and they should be changes that meet your individual needs, preferences and circumstances. It's important to mention that tiny changes don't have to be just about your diet, they can be about other things that may help with your wellbeing. e.g. you might decide to walk up one flight of stairs at work instead of taking the lift or, if you were feeling a bit lonely, you could make a tiny change to phone a particular friend once a week.

Over time, as one tiny change becomes a new habit you can add another small change and see how these eventually add up to big changes and benefits to your experience of pain, health and wellbeing.

Thanks for listening and good luck with any tiny changes you make.