

# Self-improvement project

Psychology



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**SELF-IMPROVEMENT TARGET BEHAVIOR** I have chosen to work with my soda drinking habit as the behavior that I intended to target for this exercise. The reason for my choice is health-based. From my own experience drinking soda I have found that in general the benefits that I get from it are mostly pleasure based, even as the health effects have far outweighed any pleasure that I have come to derive from it. My friends and family all tell me that soda drinking is bad for my health, and I agree. On the other hand, I can't seem to shake off the habit because I find myself looking for soda many times during the day. It seems to have taken on the dimension of an ingrained habit or even an addiction. I want to prove to myself that I can make a conscious choice away from soda and into a safer alternative, in this case water.

**STAGES OF CHANGE** I have been aware of my need to change something in the way I eat and consume food and drinks, because of the many inputs I have been getting from family, friends and my own readings regarding the ill effects of some of the processed food I am taking in. Soda has been at the back of my mind, and there were even times in the past when I would drink soda and not feel very good about taking in so much of it, while at the same time going ahead with drinking sodas. At that stage then, in terms of the model of change proposed by Prochaska, I would say I was in the contemplation stage. From the time sheets, testing the few days that I shifted from drinking a lot of soda to water, I would say I am in the preparation stage. I have tested a few days peaking my soda consumption, and deliberately cutting back to fewer sodas and then shifting to water. My personal assessment is that these are preliminary steps. The full-blown process is to involve me shifting to water for an indefinite period moving forward, and seeing for myself what it is like to live without sodas. **BASELINE**  
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DATA The charts provide me with actual data that I can then leverage to better understand where I am at the moment, in an exact fashion, rather than trying to recollect without the benefit of a visual or a journal. To me the chart was helpful in organizing my thoughts as well as providing me with a feedback on where I am. It is a conscious visual to be sure, and one that allowed me to be more focused on those activities that I have been meaning to track. I am surprised that the chart allowed me to be more conscious about my soda drinking habits. In a short span of time all of my previous preparatory experiences, including my growing ambivalence towards soda drinking, all came to the fore. The chart helped me to face the problem head on. In a few days I had peaked from four sodas to just one soda and then to water. As the days progressed I have come to focus on my eating habits, and I was surprised at how the chart made me think clearly about what I had been doing only half-consciously. So it seems to me that something that I had thought I had little control of can be controlled. The baseline data on my soda consumption provides me with factual information about what I had been doing for some time now. I am encouraged by the fact that in a span of a few days I was able to drastically cut the amount of soda I drank, and that I was able to completely do away with the habit altogether. The goal now is to be able to sustain this, and see what happens with my body and myself as I go through the change process. GOAL/DESIRED OUTCOME The baseline data provides the way forward. Psychologically it feels good that I was able to get a handle on my soda drinking habit, and that I was able to get an accurate picture of where I am at the moment. I have no illusions whatsoever about kicking the habit with just a few days of change. I am aware that unless I am fully conscious of my soda drinking at all time, my habit can sneak back and

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get the better of me. I realize that I need to watch it as much as I watch anything that is important for me. My metaphor for my change process is learning how to drive. I need to be watchful about the road ahead, and that road ahead is my journey towards a complete shift away from soda and into water purely. My goal is to be able to accomplish this within a month's time. I would like to start completely without soda for that month, to be able to see how much I can stick to a life without soda, and to see what its effects on my mind and body are. I understand that quitting for a few days is not enough. I need to be able to establish a track record of not drinking soda for a good amount of time to be able to determine where I really am with this change goal.

**PLAN FOR BEHAVIORAL CHANGE** My plan for change of my behavior is very simple. The chart has worked for me, and I intend to continue a journal of my soda drinking and eating habits, as a way to continue to be mindful of what I eat and drink. The focus of this journal shall be my soda drinking. I intend to add notes on how I feel during the course of the process, and I will also note how much water I drink everyday, and how many times in a day, and what time of the day, I feel the urge to drink sodas, and with whom. What activities prompt me to continue to drink soda? What cues from my external environment urge me to drink soda? These are also questions that I intend to note during the process. As well, my journal will include how my body changes during the course of the process. As a side effect I hope to see positive changes in my body and health as time goes by.

**BEHAVIORAL CONTRACT** I intend to continue with the process I have started and to abide by my plan as I have stated it above. The journal shall be truthful and the data accurate, and that I will let at least three other people validate the results and the data, to make sure I stay honest. Also, I intend to track

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changes to my body, including changes, including any changes in my diet, and any changes in my weight and waist size, to validate the changes in my soda consumption habits. All these shall be tracked and validated by my witnesses. Here as well I am making a contract with myself to push through with this change. This has been validated/ IMPLEMENTATION In effect the chart that I have at present already validates some of my plans. I was able to do away with sodas altogether, gradually cutting back from my peak of four sodas a day. The implementation calls for a more intense self-regulation and self-examination. To my surprise, the simple act of keeping the chart allowed me to finally bring to the open my ingrained soda drinking habit.

RESULT/EVALUATION The chart provides a good baseline on which I can build on for my planned change. The Prochaska model allows me to view this as something long-term. I intend to follow through from the preparation to the action and maintenance stages of that change model moving forward, and see where it leads me.