



## **Assessing Readiness for Physical Activity**

### **Pre-Exercise Physical Assessments**

#### **Par-Q**

Before your patients with overweight or obesity can begin a program of physical activity, you should determine if they are healthy enough to exercise independently. The Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) is a 7-question screening tool that focuses on symptoms of heart disease and also identifies musculoskeletal problems that should be evaluated before participation in a physical activity program. If your patient answers “no” to all 7 PAR-Q questions, he or she may be cleared for low to moderate physical activity, such as walking.

If your patient answers “yes” to any of the PAR-Q questions, use your professional judgment to further evaluate his or her readiness for physical activity. You may decide to follow up with more advanced screening tools such as a treadmill stress test.

#### **Mobility Assessment**

Overweight and obesity can compromise mobility and increase the risk for injury. You should assess your patients’ mobility, balance, and gait before prescribing physical activity. Patients with diminished mobility may benefit from chair-based exercise. Patients with osteoarthritis or activity-induced musculoskeletal pain may benefit from pool-based exercises or classes designed for people with arthritis. Referral to a physical therapist for rehabilitative exercise may be warranted.

#### **Medical Testing**

Based on your professional judgment, patients with metabolic, cardiac, or pulmonary disease may need a treadmill stress test to minimize the risk of injury, stroke, or heart attack. Patients may also need pulmonary function tests or musculoskeletal assessment.

#### **Readiness to Change**

People with overweight and obesity may have specific barriers to increasing their physical activity. They may feel self-conscious about exercising in a class because they feel uncomfortable and exposed in exercise clothes. They may worry that they won’t be able to keep up with others in the class and their fitness instructor won’t empathize with their physical limitations. They may believe that the recommended exercise schedule is just too much for them. All these barriers affect a patient’s readiness to change.

As discussed in module 3 of this program, assessing a patient’s readiness to change is a crucial part of ensuring that healthy lifestyle changes succeed.

The stages of readiness to change are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.

In the **precontemplation stage**, the patient has no intention of becoming physically active and isn't ready to receive a physical activity prescription. At this stage, continue to discuss the benefits of regular physical activity and help the patient work through his or her resistance.

In the **contemplation stage**, the patient is thinking about becoming physically active. At this stage, you might recommend that the patient visit gyms, look into classes, or check out exercise DVDs. You should also continue to emphasize the benefits of physical activity.

In the **preparation stage**, the patient may have purchased a new pair of walking shoes or invested in DVDs or a gym membership but has not yet started to engage in physical activity. Continue to reinforce the benefits of physical activity.

In the **action stage**, the patient is meeting the terms of the exercise prescription but for less than six months. Celebrate the patient's success, and encourage continued physical activity and adherence with the prescription.

In the **maintenance stage**, the patient has met the terms of the prescription for the past six months or more. At this stage, celebrate the patient's success and encourage continued physical activity to avoid relapse.

## **Access Evaluation**

Keep in mind that some of your patients may not have access to safe places to be physically active. Does your patient live in a safe walkable neighborhood with sidewalks, crosswalks, and access to parks? Can your patient afford gym fees? Understanding obstacles to access can help you and your patient find solutions. For example, perhaps the patient's local high school keeps the track or gym open after school hours for use by the community.