“Quick fixes” for problems with your health and your wealth may seem appealing. However, they may be based on fraudulent health and financial claims and information. The Small Steps to Health and Wealth™ program helps you explore ways to improve your behavior with a series of “small steps” instead of drastic changes promising a “quick fix.”

The objective of the Step Down/Step Up to Change strategy is to help you discover small steps down or up that you are willing to take to improve your health and/or your wealth. For a quick overview of this strategy, view the video.

You do not have to make drastic changes to improve health or spending habits. Drastic changes are often very difficult to maintain. The Step Down/Step Up to Change strategy illustrates a way to look for healthier or lower cost alternatives instead of completely depriving yourself of something you enjoy. For example, you can take small “steps down” by decreasing your consumption of extra calories or your spending on certain items or take small “steps up” by thinking of ways to gradually increase your physical activity, vegetable intake, or savings. The example given by Professor Alena Johnson at Utah State University shows how to reduce household spending by visualizing a staircase with four steps. On the top is the most expensive way to purchase an item and on the floor below the bottom step is the least expensive purchasing method. Just like spending, the principle can be used to reduce caloric intake or to make healthier food choices. Discuss the example below for making lower-calorie beverage choices:

| Super-sized soft drink | Medium-sized soft drink | 100% fruit juice and sparkling water | Ice water with lemon |

Use the Step Down/Step Up to Change Worksheets to generate ideas for reaching your health and wealth goals by making small steps down or up.
Small Steps to Health and Wealth Planning Worksheet

Setting goals, writing them down, and being able to visualize how you will feel when you achieve your goals is very important. Use the Small Steps to Health and Wealth Planning Worksheet to think about and write down one or two health and/or wealth goals for yourself.

Your goals should be as specific as possible. They should include what, when, and how much. You should begin a goal with, “I will...”

What—the change (e.g., eat more fruits and vegetables, spend less on entertainment).

When—what is the timing to reach the goal, 1 month, 6 months, 1 year, or longer?

How much—what is the level of change you are trying to achieve? How many fruits and vegetables will you add to your daily diet? How many dollars are you trying to cut in terms of monthly expenses? For example, you may write “By the end of this month, I will be eating 1 more vegetable serving every day by eating 1 cup of salad with my dinner.”

After you have written down your goals, visualize your life after achieving them. List obstacles you may encounter and some ideas on how to avoid them. Think of two or three small steps you can begin to take and set progress dates to check in with yourself. Determining an appropriate reward for yourself may help you be successful. Sharing a goal, obstacles, avoidance tactics, small steps you are going to take, and an appropriate reward with a trusted family member or friend may help you follow through with your plan.

Acknowledgements

Colorado State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Colorado counties cooperating. CSU Extension programs are available to all without discrimination. No endorsement of products mentioned is intended nor is criticism implied of products not mentioned.

 Portions of this session were adapted and excerpted from the following book: O’Neill, B. and Ensle, K. (2006). Small Steps to Health and Wealth. Ithaca, NY: NRAES. Original workshop materials were prepared by Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, and the University of Florida Extension. For additional information about purchasing the Small Steps to Health and Wealth book, visit www.nraes.org. The project was supported by the Rural Health and Safety Education Competitive Program of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grant number 2011-46100-31139. Program Materials—September, 2013.