

## HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: MAKING CHOICES WITH AWARENESS

It is probably not always obvious but we are constantly making choices. We choose to get out of bed, what to eat, whether to shower or not, whether to study or surf the Net, whether to stop after one beer or many. Many of our choices are so automatic or habitual that we rarely think of them as choices. And yet they are.

One of the many benefits of learning to be more mindful or present moment focused is that we can be more aware of how we behave. We can open the fridge with greater awareness (“Do I really think it is a good idea to have another piece of cake?”) or respond to our partner in a calm considered way (instead of from a reactive, knee-jerk position). The benefits are potentially enormous....we may have improved relationships, healthier bodies and clearer minds! So how exactly do we do it?

1. **Be present** – connect with what you are doing right now. What am I thinking? How am I feeling? What is happening in my body?
2. **Connect with your values** – How do I want to be in this situation? What would be a choice that fits with what is important to me? (e.g. if at the pub with a group of students who are keen to stay for a “few drinks” and you have an assignment to do which choice will be a wise one in this situation?)
3. **Accept thoughts and feelings** – be aware of difficult thoughts and feelings that act as a barrier to making a “wise” choice in this moment. Is your mind selling you a story that you know doesn’t fit with your experience, e.g. “A few more drinks won’t hurt” or “everyone else is doing it so stuff it” even though you are behind in your studies and doing a course with higher work load. Use defusion skills to help you to watch these thoughts and feelings without getting tangled up in them (see link below for reminders about “getting unhooked”).  
[http://www.counselling.unsw.edu.au/help\\_yourself/ACT\\_Newsletters/ACTing%20on%20Life%20Newsletter%201%20\(Feb08\).pdf](http://www.counselling.unsw.edu.au/help_yourself/ACT_Newsletters/ACTing%20on%20Life%20Newsletter%201%20(Feb08).pdf)
4. **Take action** – choose the course of action that fits best with what really matters to you. This may often be the harder choice in the short term but tends to be better in the long term. For example, choosing to stay home and finish an assignment when all your friends are having fun will be really hard to do at the time but feel good once it is completed on time.

### **One choice after the other**

Life can be seen as a series of choices that we make, one after the other. And if at times you make a choice that isn’t in keeping with your values there is always the next moment to make a different choice. Be kind to yourself and whenever you notice that you have acted against what is important to you recognise the opportunity to get back on track

