





H Healthy Habits: *use the science.*


When it comes to starting a new habit or breaking a bad one, willpower and motivation alone won't cut it – for most of us they wax and wane like a lunar cycle on speed. Research shows that rather than trying to become the perfect human overnight, we need to start small, make it easy for ourselves, and celebrate every little win.¹ Here's a summary of the great tips from leaders in this field – BJ Fogg, James Clear and Gretchen Rubin...

 **Be the behaviour.** We're more successful at new habits when they are meaningful to us – we're not doing them for someone else's approval – and when we can make them part of our self-identity. When I'm resolutely ignoring the plate of brownies on offer, I tell myself (the former sugarholic) "I'm a savoury person". To help with my exercising regularly, I tell myself "I'm an active person".

 **Create the right environment.** No one would seriously try giving up sugar while working in a chocolate shop. We need to make it easier for ourselves by reducing the friction between us and the new behaviour and increasing it between us and the behaviour we want to avoid. For example, to help me eat less sugar, I no longer buy chocolate or biscuits at the supermarket (and avoid shopping when feeling tired or emotionally needy – my sugar/treat trigger). Any treats we have for the kids are kept in the garage – adding a barrier by making them harder to get to. And I have plenty of non-sugary treats or snacks handy instead.

 **Book it in.** We're more successful when we schedule the 'when, where and who with' to create the new habit – and it takes out potential procrastination and eliminates decision-making. To make it easier to exercise in the morning, I put my workout clothes next to my bed including my socks, shoes, and water bottle to avoid the distraction of having to make decisions or look for anything. I have also agreed to meet my friend at the corner of our road at 6.45am and I don't want to stand her up!

 **Swap it out.** Most of us struggle to ditch those unwanted habits because 'eat no junk food', or 'stop procrastinating' are too vague as goals. What behaviour can you replace the unwanted behaviour with? Instead of watching another Netflix episode I Worldle, and there's a bottle of kombucha staring me in the face in the fridge instead of wine...

 **Don't just start small. Start tiny.** Even dramatic transformations begin with small steps. How often do we put off doing something because we don't have time? Start that new habit with the micro-version: three deep, even breaths; one push up; noticing one good thing at the end of each day.

 **Remind and pair.** Set a visible reminder to prompt the new habit and pair it to something you already do habitually. For years I never flossed regularly except for

¹"Tiny Habits", BJ Fogg, 2019; "Atomic Habits", James Clear, 2018, "Better Than Before", Gretchen Rubin, 2015

the week before seeing the dentist. Then I started putting my dental floss on top of the toothpaste tube so I had to move it to brush my teeth.



High-five yourself. The way our brains work means that even though we *know* this new behaviour is good for us, we need to *feel* how good it is to make it stick.

Experiencing positive emotion either before, during or after doing the new behaviour helps wire it in to be more automatic. This can be as simple as celebrating our success by saying, "Yeah, go me!".



Plan to fail. We will all fail at some point. Self-compassion and having a plan will get us back on track faster than beating ourselves up. Try making the behaviour even smaller or pairing it with something else, and remember to celebrate the new achievement no matter how small.

When I've missed my scheduled exercise because I got busy ('no time' is so often the good habits handbrake), I know I do have time for just one push-up.

Build your habits with pairing or stacking.

- Write a list of all the things you do on a regular basis
- Look for something you already do that fits well with your new habit
- How can you make your new habit a micro-version, super tiny, just to get started?
- What else can you do to make it easy to do (remove barriers)?
- How else can you remind yourself to do it (what visual reminders can you put up?)

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your habit 'recipe':

After I [existing behaviour] I will [new tiny habit] and [your style of celebrating]

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