



# Curating Habits That Stick



*Saint  
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# Why we created this eBook

Habits drive our daily actions and steer the direction of our lives. They influence our wellbeing and overall quality of life. Responsible for nearly half of everything we do at the subconscious level, there is nothing stronger than habit.

Making a choice that is one percent better or one percent worse seems insignificant in the present moment—you can't see the alarming consequences or the long-term benefits—but compounded over ten or twenty years, these choices can well and truly change the trajectory of your life.

We understand that building new habits comes with a unique set of challenges. It can be daunting, uncomfortable and the resistance you encounter can quickly extinguish your motivation. We get it.

BUT

With the right tools, resources and support, you can build systems that alleviate resistance and accelerate your habit building process.

The fact is, you have the capacity to change your habits. You can make new choices and decisions that are consistent with the person you want to be and the life you want to live.

# Why we created this eBook

It all begins with understanding how habits are structured, learning how to use this to your advantage and trusting the compound effect of small changes over time.

The goal of “Curating Habits That Stick” is to help you build lasting habits that contribute to your personal growth, wellbeing and overall quality of life.

Let’s be real though. There will be speed bumps.  
There will be bruised egos.

The reality is, falling off the wagon is part of the process, so avoid shooting for a perfect record. It’s important to be realistic from the very beginning.

You can’t program your habits simply by writing them down. You need to invest time and energy to encode the habits you desire.

This involves taking responsibility for your actions, building or troubleshooting the systems you have in place and picking yourself up every single time you fall off the wagon.

This ebook will clarify the importance of habits, provide inspiration for growth and summarise proven techniques for building strong habits and breaking bad ones.

# Our Mission

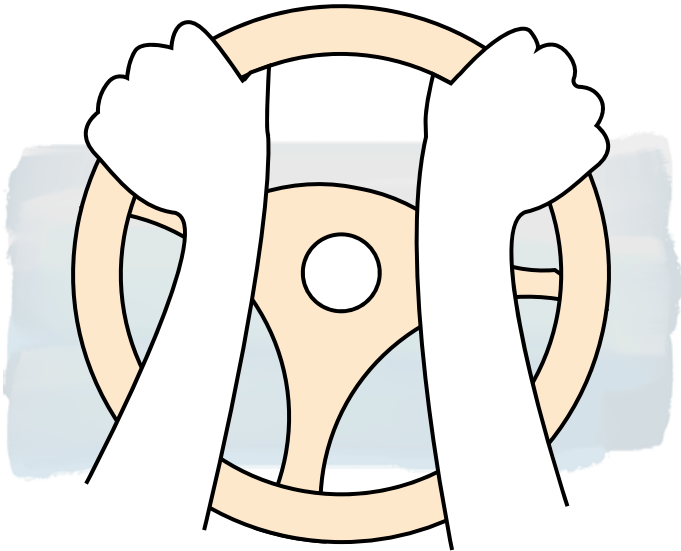
Our mission is to provide you with the tools that empower you to keep self-care at the top of your to-do list, so that you can design, build and live a life that genuinely fulfills you, without compromising your wellbeing in the process.



# What is a Habit?

A habit is an automatic response to a specific situation that is acquired through frequent repetition.

# 5 Fast Facts: Why Habits Matter



## HABITS STEER THE DIRECTION OF YOUR LIFE

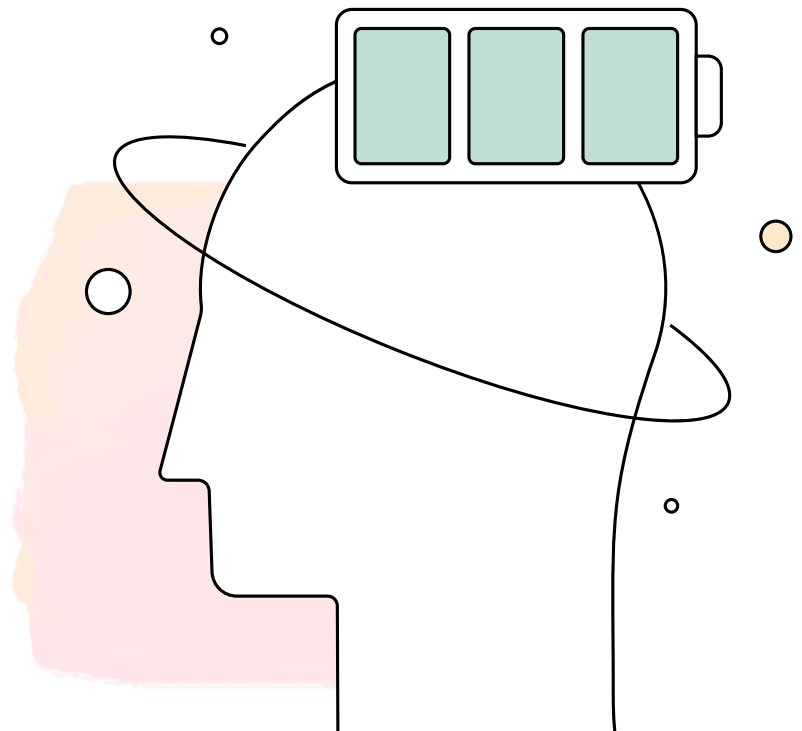
**45%** of our reported activities are habitual...

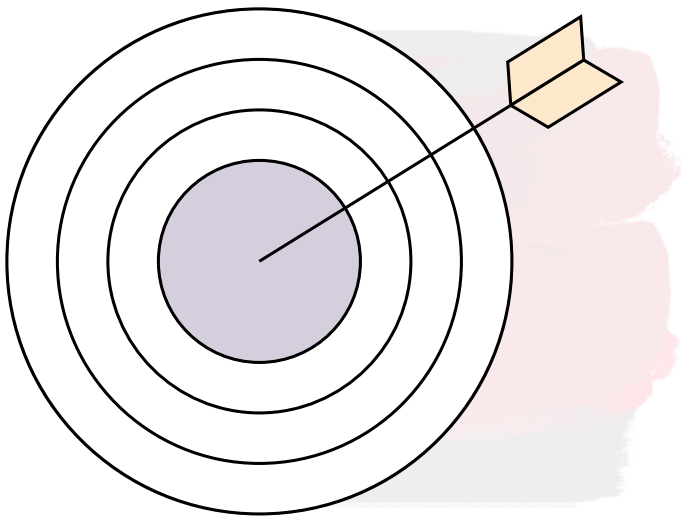
...which means nearly half of everything we do is performed automatically without much thought. This can work for you by promoting order and efficiency or against you by triggering destructive behaviour in the background.

## HABITS CONSERVE BRAIN POWER

They are mental shortcuts that reduce the number of decisions you need to make on a daily basis. Once you associate a solution to a problem you need to solve, you will keep coming back to the same solution.

This allows your brain to conserve cognitive resources and mental energy for higher level activities and outsource low-level decision making to your environment.



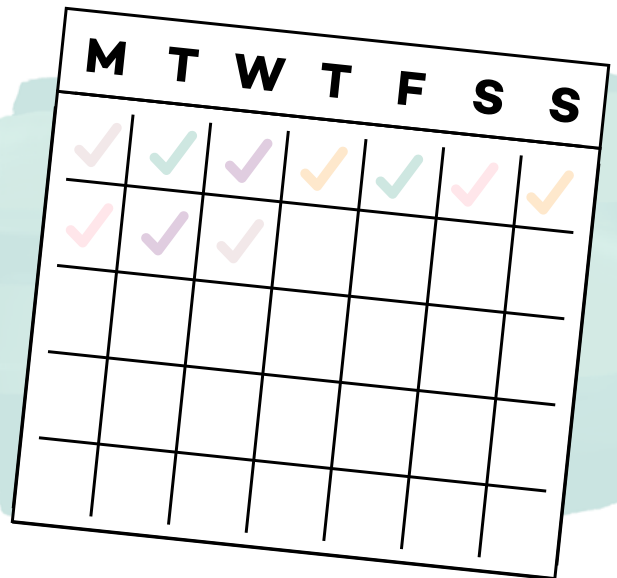


## HABITS CAN REPLACE MOTIVATION

Habits make difficult things easy. Once you develop a habit and it is deeply embedded into your routine, the cues in your environment will trigger an autopilot response. You won't need to rely on bursts of motivation and willpower to follow through with your habits.

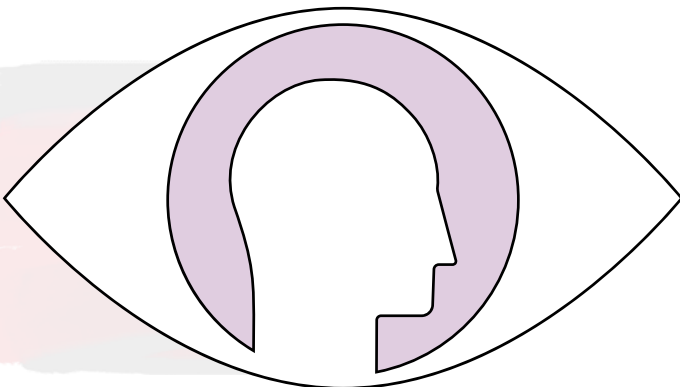
## SMALL HABITS HELP FULFILL YOUR POTENTIAL

If you get one percent better every day for a year, **you will get 37 times better by the end of the year.** Changes that seem small initially will compound over time to unleash a new level of performance that will help you achieve your long-term goals. An improvement in one area almost always creates a ripple effect in other areas of your life.



## HABITS REINFORCE YOUR IDENTITY

The more often you repeat a behaviour, the more you embody the identity associated with that behaviour. This means the easiest way to change who you are is to change what you do.





# The Impact of Your Beliefs and Assumptions

Your habits shape your identity due to the frequency at which they are repeated. This means **the easiest way to change who you are is to change what you do.**

Effective behaviour change involves consciously changing your beliefs and how you view yourself.

## Ask yourself

- Who do I want to be?
- What are my core values and principles?
- What do I stand for?
- How do I want to be viewed?

In order for new habits to last, they need to become part of your identity. Attempting to change your behaviour without letting go of your old identity or the underlying beliefs associated with your bad habits will be an uphill battle.

## Example

Alison has decided to quit smoking. Unaware of this lifestyle change, her colleague offers Alison a cigarette. There are two responses that come to Alison's mind:

1. *No thanks, I'm trying to quit.*
2. *No thanks I don't smoke.*

There's a big difference between these two responses. In the first response, Alison is still identifying herself as a smoker whereas in the second, she has established herself as a non-smoker—an identity which is consistent with her habit intentions.

When your behaviour and self-image are aligned, you're no longer "changing" your behaviour, you're simply behaving like the person you already believe yourself to be.

# Begin with Building Self-Awareness

Holding up a mirror to your habits can be uncomfortable, especially if your real-time behaviour and actions conflict with how you outwardly describe and view yourself. However, **the process of behaviour change must begin with an understanding of what habits are adding value and what habits are holding you back.**

The following exercises can help expand your level of awareness.

## Tools for Building Self-Awareness

### HABIT SCORECARD

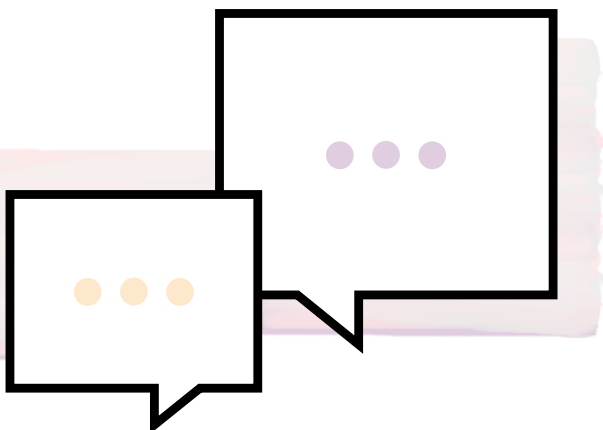
Make a list of your daily habits and mark them as good, bad or neutral based on how they benefit or hurt you in the long-term. This can help you prioritise desired changes.

As a general rule, habits that reinforce your desired identity are usually good and habits that are inconsistent with your desired identity are generally bad.

Daily habits	Good (+) Bad (-) Neutral (=)
Jumping on social media as soon as I wake up	-
Stretching	+
Moisturising my face	+
Skipping breakfast	-

### POINTING AND CALLING

Verbalise your actions. Hearing your behaviour said out loud shifts you into a more conscious state of mind which magnifies the consequences of your actions.

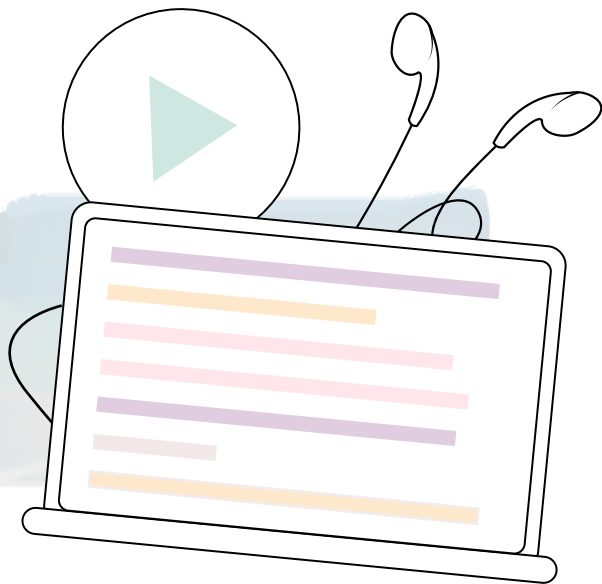
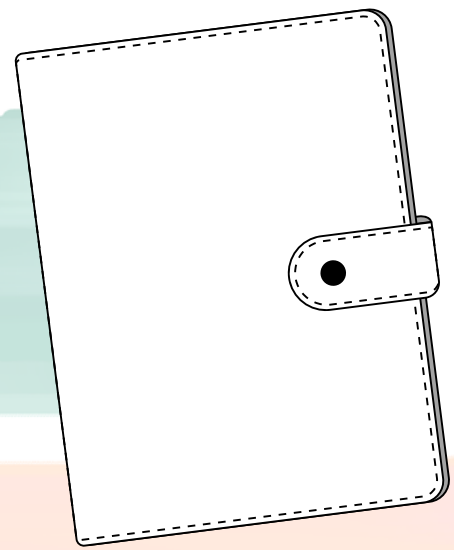


## JOURNALLING

Reflect on your daily reactions and experiences. This can help you identify common thought and behaviour patterns and suggest areas to work on.

### Ask yourself

- What triggered my reaction?
- Is my behaviour consistent with the type of person I want to be?
- What could I have done differently?



## FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Speak to people you trust. They can help you see things from a different perspective.

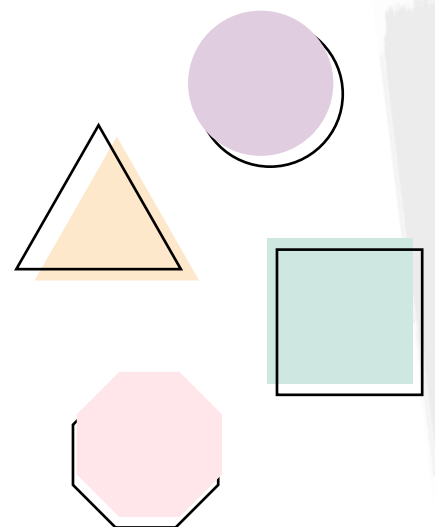
## EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL

Read books, listen to podcasts, watch documentaries, sign up for courses of interest. Immersing yourself in the world of education can open you up to alternative ways of living.

## PERSONALITY TEST

Complete a personality test (like the Big Five) to understand your strengths and weaknesses. The more you learn about yourself, the more skilled you become at addressing your personal, professional and social needs.

Since it's easier to build habits that align with your natural abilities and strengths, your results can help you decide what habits to focus your time and energy on.



# Establish Your “WHY” Statement

Establish a list of compelling reasons for building your desired habits. Educate yourself on the short and long-term benefits and consider the negative consequences of inaction. This will be your personal source of motivation. After a week, reflect on what other reasons you have for building this habit and add them to the list.

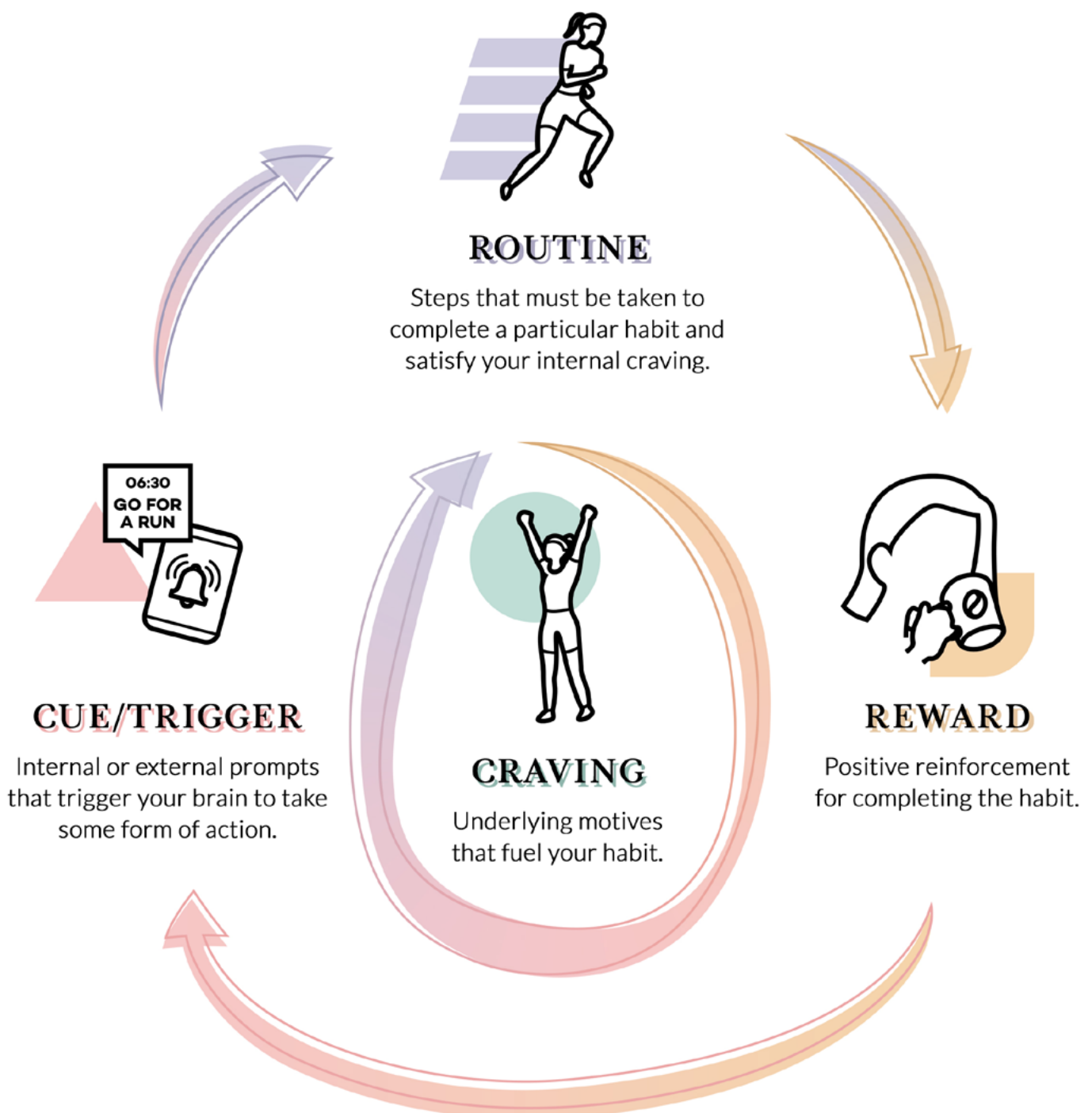
## Ask yourself

- What underlying cravings does this habit satisfy?
- What are the immediate and long-term consequences of abandoning my desired behaviour?
- Are there hard facts and evidence to support my intentions?
- What will this habit allow me to achieve?

# The Habit Loop: How Habits are Formed

There are four components to every habit: **Cue**, **Craving**, **Routine** and **Reward** and your brain will automatically run through these four steps in the same order every time you complete a habit.

The **cue** triggers a **craving**, which fuels your **routine**. This provides a **reward**, which satisfies your underlying craving and ultimately reinforces your habit.



# Troubleshooting the Habit Loop

If you've had several unsuccessful attempts at building the same habit, this section is for you.

By troubleshooting the weakest link, you can appropriately address the bottleneck and build systems that accelerate your habit-building process.

It's important to resolve the bottleneck first (if there is one) to avoid problems arising from a broken and unsustainable system.

## Example

Emily has already tried building the habit of going to the gym, but she hasn't had much success. She feels like it's a massive inconvenience and often opts for an hour of Netflix instead. Sometimes Emily completely forgets that she said she was going to go.

She feels that a lack of motivation is the issue. However, when she starts troubleshooting her habit, she realises that she hasn't thought about or written down her reasons for building this habit.

Further troubleshooting reveals a lack of obvious cues and incentives to reward her good behaviour.

The purpose of the flowchart is to help you understand what part of the loop is broken. We still encourage you to read all sections to gain a complete understanding of how habits are formed, however, the flowchart will show you where to focus most of your attention.

Have you thought about all the reasons **why** you want to adopt this habit?

**NO** →

Generate an honest list of reasons **why** you want to build this habit.

**PAGE 11**

**YES**



Do you know exactly **when** and **where** you will perform your habit?

**NO** →

Create a habit intention by completing this sentence:  
I will perform **[habit]** at **[time]** at **[location]**.

**PAGE 19**

**YES**



It's time to troubleshoot the habit loop.

**Is your habit obvious?**

Are there highly visible and consistent **cues** (reminders) in your environment, like a recurring alarm or strategically positioned objects around the house to trigger your desired habit?

**NO** →

**Optimise your environment.** Increase exposure to positive cues that trigger your good habits.

**PAGE 19**

**YES**

**Is there a strong desire (craving) to complete your habit?**

Do you get excited about the benefits of completing your habit and/or avoiding the consequences of inaction?

**NO** →

Try enlisting the help of an accountability partner or pairing your habit with an activity you enjoy.

**PAGE 23**

**YES**

**Is your habit simple and easy to complete?**


Have you eliminated unnecessary steps?

**NO** →

**Streamline your habit.** Remove unnecessary steps and eliminate “in the moment” decision making by making decisions in advance.

**PAGE 29**





**Are you rewarding your good**


**behaviour?** Is the reward immediate, enjoyable and aligned with your values?

**NO** 

Try repurposing fun everyday activities (like watching Netflix or checking social media) into rewards by strategically positioning them immediately after your habit.

**PAGE 34**

**YES**



**Experiment with other immediate rewards.**

If you **crave** this reward when you are exposed to the cue, you've got a winner!

# How to Build New Habits

“First we make our habits,  
then our habits make us.”

Charles C. Noble

# Apply the Four Laws of Behaviour Change

The four laws of behaviour change can be used as a framework for building new habits.

The first three laws of behaviour change increase the likelihood that you will perform the habit on this occasion. The fourth law of behaviour change increases the likelihood that you will repeat the habit next time.

Each law corresponds to a specific part of the habit loop.

1. **Cue:** Make it obvious
2. **Craving:** Make it attractive
3. **Routine:** Make it easy
4. **Reward:** Make it satisfying

# 1. Cue: Make it Obvious

Many of the actions you take are shaped not by choice but by the most obvious option available.

## What are cues?

Cues are internal or external prompts that trigger the brain to take some form of action. It's something that the brain strongly associates with a particular habit, like an object, pre-existing routine, specific time, location, emotional state or another person.

## How to make your cues obvious

### CREATE A HABIT INTENTION

Making a specific plan for **when** and **where** you will perform a new habit increases your likelihood of following through with it because the plan **alleviates decision fatigue**, **provides clarity** and **helps you say no to things** that would otherwise distract you and derail your progress.

I will [behaviour] at [time] in [location]

### Example

I will meditate at 7am in my bedroom, on my bed.

### OPTIMISE YOUR ENVIRONMENT WITH POSITIVE CUES

The reality is, your behaviour is largely influenced by the environment you are in and the cues you are exposed to. This means a small change in what you see or experience can greatly influence the habits you engage in.

Instead of trying to exercise self-control when temptation arises, your energy is better spent **optimising** or **redesigning your environment** to make good habits easier and bad habits harder.

This involves increasing exposure to positive cues (that trigger good habits) and reducing exposure to negative cues (that trigger bad habits).

It's a lot easier to follow through with your habit intentions when there are plenty of positive cues sprinkled throughout your environment to trigger your desired behaviour and a sufficient number of barriers between you and your bad habits.

The most effective cues are **specific, consistent, automatic** and **unavoidable**. A habit will not occur without a clear trigger.

## Example

Sarah wants to read in bed (desired habit) instead of scrolling through Instagram at night (bad habit).

To optimise her environment, Sarah decides to invest in a reading light and an extra pillow to make reading in bed more comfortable. She also decides to keep a few books on her bedside table (positive cues).

Sarah realises that her TV, phone and laptop are the primary sources of distraction. She decides to remove these items from the bedroom, including the chargers for her laptop and phone (negative cues).

## Ask yourself

- Is the cue specific? Can it be misinterpreted?
- Is the cue consistent? Will it be there on the days I want to complete my habit?
- Is the cue highly visible? Will I definitely see the cue?
- What other cues can I set up in my environment to remind me to take action?

## GIVE EVERY HABIT A HOME

Habits form in stable and predictable environments, where everything has a place and purpose.

You can optimise your environment by dividing your space into activity zones so that every habit has a home. For example, a chair for reading, a desk for working, a cushion for meditating.

Using one space or object (like a phone or iPad) for multiple habits can create a mish mash of cues that subsequently hinder the flow of your habit.

### Example

The couch was a location Alex would often work AND relax. This became problematic because she found it difficult to stay productive during the day (with the TV staring at her, waiting to be turned on).

Alex also found it difficult to switch off at night (with her laptop in plain sight). Alex later realised this was due to the mish mash of cues she had created by associating the couch with both work and post work habits.

### Ask yourself

- What object or space will I use for this habit?
- Am I using the same space or object as the “cue” for multiple habits?
- How can I divide my space so that every habit has a home?

## IMPLEMENT TIME-BASED TRIGGERS

Time is one of the most effective cues because there is no room for ambiguity. You can use digital reminders and alarms to create time-based triggers for your habits.

## Example

Emily wants to meditate for 5 minutes every morning, so she sets a recurring 7am alarm with a reminder that says “It’s time to meditate.”

## Ask yourself

- Based on my current schedule, what is the best time for me to consistently complete my habit?

## STACK YOUR HABITS

Most of your habits are an automatic response to something you already do consistently, like brushing your teeth, taking a shower, getting dressed and eating breakfast.

You can take advantage of this momentum by stacking new habits on top of your existing habits. This means **your current habit becomes the trigger for your new habit**. Habits are easier to build when they fit into the flow of your life.

To be an effective trigger, your cue must have the same frequency as the new habit you are building. If you are building a daily habit, the pre-existing event or habit must also be completed daily.

After I [existing habit], I will [new habit]

## Example

- After I get out of bed, I will meditate for 1 minute.
- After I brush my teeth, I will moisturise my face.

## Ask yourself

- What pre-existing event or habit can I use to stack my new habit on top?
- Does this pre-existing event or habit share the same frequency as my new habit?

## 2. Cravings: Make it Attractive

Habits are a dopamine driven feedback loop which means **your desire to act rises when you experience a spike in dopamine**. It's worth noting that dopamine is released not only when you experience pleasure but also when you anticipate it.

When you complete a habit for the first time, dopamine rises when you experience the reward. The next time around, dopamine rises immediately after you notice the cue, before any action is taken. **It's the anticipation and craving of the reward you've experienced previously that drives you to repeat the habit.**

### What are Cravings?

Cravings are the underlying motives that drive your habits. If there is no internal craving, there is no reason to act.

Your feelings and emotions tell you whether to remain in your current state or make a change. They indicate what to pursue and what to avoid.

Cravings emerge when there is a desire to feel differently—when there is a gap between where you are now (how you currently feel) and where you want to be in the future (how you want to feel).

The habits you perform are merely attempts to address the cravings you experience and when a habit successfully addresses a desire, you develop a craving to do it again.



# How to make your cravings attractive

## PAIR IT WITH AN ACTIVITY YOU ENJOY

Pairing your desired habit with an activity you enjoy is one way to build positive associations. You're more likely to find your new habit attractive if you get to do one of your favourite things at the same time.

### Example

Sarah doesn't like folding her laundry, but she really wants to keep her wardrobe neat and tidy. To make this habit more enticing, Sarah pairs it with an episode of Friends. The dopamine spike that occurs when Sarah gets to watch her favourite TV show makes this habit far more attractive.

### Ask yourself

- What's something enjoyable I can realistically do at the same time as my habit?

## REFRAME THE WAY YOU TALK ABOUT IT

Perspective is a powerful tool. Subtly reframing the way you view your habits can make them more appealing.

Instead of "I have to" which implies the habit is a chore, try "I get to..."

### Example

Instead of "I have to go to the gym," try "I get to go to the gym."

## Ask yourself

- What do I usually say when I talk about my habits?
- How can I reframe the way I talk about my habits?

## USE A COMMITMENT DEVICE

A commitment device is a self-imposed system, like a written habit contract in which you state your commitment to a particular habit and the consequences that will occur if you don't follow through. You'll need to find one or two people to act as your accountability partners and sign off on the contract.

This is a brilliant way to lock in your good intentions and control future impulsive behaviour. The psychological power of loss aversion and social accountability can often be enough to sustain your commitment.

## Example

Melanie wants to go to three Crossfit classes per week. This is part of her Triathlon training program, so she doesn't want to miss a class unless she's really sick. She decides to implement a financial penalty of \$50 which is donated to an organisation she dislikes every time she skips a class. With the help of Sarah and Zoe, Melanie creates a commitment contract on [StickK](#) to keep her honest and accountable.

## Ask yourself

- What are some penalties I can implement for not sticking to my habits?

## HIGHLIGHT THE BENEFITS

Highlight the short and long-term benefits of following through with your good habits. Consider the physical, mental, social, spiritual or financial benefits of completing your good habits.

### Example

Sarah wants to meal prep every Sunday (good habit) so that she can control what goes into her meals, feel nourished and save money for a holiday instead of buying lunch every day (benefits).

### Ask yourself

- What are the short and long-term benefits of completing this habit?

## LEVERAGE SOCIAL NORMS

Whether we are conscious of it or not, social norms guide our behaviour. They set the expectation for what is normal and accepted and subsequently increase or decrease the attractiveness of any given habit.

**It is easier to build new habits when you're surrounded by people already doing them.**

It's even easier when you share something in common with the people you're around because it feels less like a chore and more like something "people like you" already engage in.

Given our inherent desire to fit in, the "normal" behaviour of the groups we are part of (or want to be part of) tends to trump our personal intentions and desired behaviour. We are naturally drawn to behaviours that earn us respect, status and praise. **Nothing sustains motivation better than belonging to a community.**

Think about your habits for a moment and the habits of your friends, family and those you admire. It's likely you've adopted the habits of those you are closest with and those you admire.

**Here are three ways to leverage social norms:**

### **A. JOIN THE RIGHT GROUPS**

Surround yourself with people who have the habits you desire and leverage the power of social norms. New habits seem **much more achievable when you are surrounded by people already doing** them because it normalises the behaviour. Nothing sustains motivation better than belonging to a group.

#### *Ask yourself*

- What groups can I physically and virtually join?

#### *Example*

Melanie is training for a Triathlon. She wants to build the habit of running in the evening, so she decides to join a local running group she found on Meetup.

### **B. GET AN ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER**

The fact is, we care about what others think, which means the cost of inaction is immediately greater when someone else is watching our every move. You're much more likely to follow through with your intentions if your social reputation is at stake.

#### *Ask yourself*

- Who do I trust to keep me accountable?

#### *Example*

Emily wants to hit the gym three times a week. She decides to enlist a friend to check in with her every Monday, Wednesday and Friday (her designated gym days) to ask if she is going to the gym. Emily also agrees to send the same friend a post-workout selfie as proof.

### **C. DO IT WITH A FRIEND**

Building a new habit with a friend who is equally driven to improve themselves can boost your commitment. Similar to having an accountability partner, you're less likely to abandon your habit intentions when you're in the social spotlight.

#### *Ask yourself*

- Who could I realistically build this habit with?

#### *Example*

Zoe wants to start practising yoga, but she's already nervous about going alone. She decides to join a yoga studio with a friend who shares a similar schedule. Zoe knows that she is less likely to bail on a class when she knows Sarah will be there as she won't want to let Sarah down.

### 3. Routine: Make it Easy

The human brain follows the law of least effort. It is wired to conserve energy where possible and choose the easiest and most convenient option. Put simply, **we want to do what is easy.**

The key is identifying and removing any points of friction that hold you back so that you can achieve more with less effort.

#### What is a routine?

The routine is what you do, feel or think in response to your craving. It refers to the steps that must be taken to complete a particular habit and satisfy your internal craving.

#### How to make your routine easier

##### **SIMPLIFY AND STREAMLINE**

Every habit can be broken down into smaller steps and each step is dependent on the completion of the previous step. One break in the chain disrupts the entire habit, so the goal is to simplify or minimise the number of steps involved.

## Example

Zoe considers all the steps she needs to take to attend a 6am yoga class. Search for activewear in wardrobe > Get dressed > Fill up drink bottle > Grab mat from study > Put shoes on > Drive to yoga (10 minutes) > Park car > Walk to studio > Practise yoga

Upon reflection, Zoe realises she can eliminate a few steps by putting her activewear out and filling up her drink bottle the night before. She also decides to leave her mat at the studio for convenience.

The steps become:

Get dressed > Put shoes on > Drive to yoga > Park car > Walk to studio > Practise yoga.

## Ask yourself

- Is this step necessary? If so, can I make it easier?

## ELIMINATE DECISION MAKING

**The less energy a habit requires, the more likely it is to occur.** Focus on making your habit as easy as possible in the moment so that you can reap the benefits in the long run.

By eliminating “in the moment” decision making, you go from “planning to do” the habit to “currently doing” the habit.

## Example

To make her gym routine easier and minimise resistance in the morning, Emily decides to put her gym clothes out the night before and have a workout plan in place.

## Ask yourself

- Can I make these decisions in advance?

## ELIMINATE EXCUSES

Identifying potential excuses ahead of time gives you the upper hand. A common excuse is “I don’t have time for it.”

Scheduling your habit at a consistent time and creating a Plan B in case the normal time is unavailable can help nullify this excuse. Plan B can either be another time slot in your schedule or a smaller version of your habit.

## Example

Emily is ready to say goodbye to excuses. Instead of abandoning her workout regime which often happens when she has to stay back at work or run unexpected errands, she decides to research and bookmark a few 15-30 minute home workouts on YouTube that she can easily access when her regular schedule is out of order.

## Ask yourself

- What is one excuse I have? How can I eliminate it?
- What are some daily “emergencies” that are likely to pull me off course?

## TRY THE TWO-MINUTE RULE

Shooting high is always tempting, but going hard in the very beginning isn’t an effective long-term strategy. If you approach your habits with this attitude, you’re more likely to abandon them completely once the initial spark of motivation fades.



Implementing the two-minute rule can be helpful when you're struggling to build a new habit.

**The rule states your new habit should take less than two minutes to complete.**

The goal is to make your habit as easy as possible to start so that you can show up consistently. The key is to **keep it below the point where it feels like work.**

Although this may feel unproductive at first, it's important to recognise that **a habit must be established before it can be improved.** It's always better to do less than you hoped than to do nothing at all. Ultimately, the goal is to make it so easy you can't say no in the beginning.

### Example

Emily wants to meditate for 15 minutes every day, but she knows she's better off starting small (1 minute of meditation) since she has never meditated before.

### Ask yourself

- What is a smaller version of my habit I can start with and master?

## HONOUR NATURAL PREFERENCES AND RHYTHMS

It's important to honour your natural rhythms when creating new habits. Remember that trying to change too much at once can do more harm than good. If your energy levels are low in the morning, you are better off establishing an evening ritual instead of forcing a morning routine.

## Example

Melanie wants to fit in a morning run before work, but she struggles to get out of bed in the morning. She's a big sleeper and needs nine hours of sleep each night. She feels guilty for snoozing her alarm and a little disappointed that she can't uphold a morning routine like her housemate.

Melanie recognises that she needs the extra hour of sleep and morning routines aren't for everyone, so she decides to run in the evening instead.

## Ask yourself

- How do I feel in the morning?
- How do I feel in the evening?

## 4. Reward: Make it Satisfying

One of the challenges associated with building new habits is a lack of self-empathy. Studies have shown when you think about your future self, you activate the same part of your brain as when you think about a complete stranger.

This is important because focusing exclusively on the long-term rewards of your good behaviour is not an effective strategy.

The human brain has evolved to prioritise immediate rewards over delayed rewards which means immediate pleasure is necessary to sustain your motivation in the short term while long-term rewards and evidence of your new identity accumulate in the background.

The first three laws of behaviour change (make it obvious, make it attractive and make it easy) increase the likelihood that you will perform the habit on this occasion. The fourth law of behaviour change (make it satisfying) increases the likelihood that you will repeat the habit next time.

### What are rewards?

Rewards close the feedback loop and reinforce the habit. They teach you what habits are worth remembering in the future.

#### THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF REWARDS:

**Extrinsic rewards** are external and tangible outcomes, like receiving money and recognition or avoiding things like public embarrassment and financial loss.

They generally take the form of “I get” or “I avoid.”

## Examples of Extrinsic rewards

**Physiological:** taking a break and having lunch

**Psychological:** ticking off your habits on a habit tracker

**Social:** sharing your progress with a friend

**Physical:** receiving a badge or medal

**Verbal:** praise or compliments from your work colleagues

**Audial:** the satisfying sound your fitbit makes when you reach 10,000 steps for the day.

**Intrinsic rewards** are internal feelings that are triggered by completing the habit, like feeling accomplished, focused or relaxed.

They generally take the form of “I feel.”

## Examples of Intrinsic rewards

This involves an element of mindfulness and reflection.

**Physical feelings:** after stretching in the morning, you feel less tension in your body and over time, you notice you are more flexible.

**Mental feelings:** after meditating consistently for six months, you notice you are calmer and less irritable.

**Satisfaction of completion:** seeing the progress you've made using your habit tracker has given you a sense of pride.

# How to make your reward satisfying

## CHOOSE REWARDS THAT CAN BE EXPERIENCED IMMEDIATELY

The rule is, what is immediately rewarded is repeated and what is immediately punished is avoided. Pleasure teaches your brain that a behaviour is worth remembering and repeating, which means you are more likely to repeat a habit when the experience is satisfying.

## CHOOSE REWARDS THAT COMPLEMENT YOUR DESIRED IDENTITY

Completing your gym routine and rewarding yourself with a pack of chips and a can of coke is not ideal if you're striving to be the healthiest version of yourself.

This immediate reward doesn't align with the person you want to become. Opting for a healthy treat, crossing it off on your habit tracker, sharing your progress with a friend and acknowledging the release of tension in your body are more appropriate rewards.

## REPURPOSE EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES INTO REWARDS

Consider other fun activities you already engage in on a regular basis, like watching Netflix, checking social media, playing games and taking a bath. These are all dopamine-releasing activities that you can strategically repurpose into useful rewards by doing them immediately after your most difficult habits.

## EXPERIMENT WITH REWARDS

You may need to experiment with a few rewards before you uncover the best way to reinforce your habit. If your chosen reward does not satisfy your cravings, experiment with a different reward.

### Ask yourself

- Is this reward immediately granted?
- Is this reward aligned with my values/desired identity?
- Does this reward satisfy my underlying craving?
- Does this reward make me want to repeat this habit in the future?

# How to Break Bad Habits

“I value self-discipline, but creating systems that make it next to impossible to misbehave is more reliable than self-control.”

Tim Ferriss

# Find a Healthy Substitute

Bad habits address certain needs in your life, most of which are related to stress and boredom.

Despite the long-term consequences of these actions, they provide some immediate (mostly short-lived) benefits that keep you coming back for more. If you try to eliminate your bad habit entirely, certain needs go unfulfilled.

The reality is, trying to exercise willpower and “just not do it” is a short-term strategy.

**Replacing your bad habit with a healthier ritual that addresses the same underlying need is a more realistic strategy.**

The bottom line is, you need to plan ahead in order to break your default systems for managing your needs.

## Ask yourself

- What is the craving my bad habit satisfies?
- What can I do instead when I get the urge to [insert bad habit]?
- Does this substitute address my underlying cravings?

## Example

Smoking (bad habit) calms Alison down when she is feeling stressed. What she is craving is stress-relief.

Instead of using cigarettes for stress relief, she could listen to a pre-made playlist that relaxes her and/or practise deep breathing when the urge to smoke arises. Listening to music and focusing on her breath has calmed Alison down in the past which means it is a worthy substitute.

# Apply the Four Laws of Behaviour Change

We can utilise the same framework for breaking bad habits by flipping the rules.

1. **Cue:** Make it invisible
2. **Craving:** Make it unattractive
3. **Routine:** Make it difficult
4. **Reward:** Make it unsatisfying



# 1. Cue: Make it Invisible

Your behaviour is largely influenced by the environment you are in and the cues you are exposed to.

## How to make your cues invisible

### IDENTIFY THE CUE

The cue is what triggers your bad habit. It could be an object, pre-existing routine, specific time, location, emotional state or another person that prompts you to take action. When you feel the urge to do your bad habit, ask yourself the following questions.

#### Ask yourself

- What did I just do?
- What time is it?
- Where am I?
- How do I feel right now?
- Who am I with?
- How many times per day do I feel the urge?

The goal is to identify what cue is consistent every time you feel the urge. Becoming aware of your internal and external triggers and how often they surface is the first step to changing your behaviour.

You might learn that you snack on junk food when you feel sad, drink excessively when you're with a particular friend or that you check your emails every time a conversation about work comes up.

## Example

Melanie has a bad habit of checking her emails in the evening, even though she wants to mentally unplug from work. The urge to check her emails only arises when she is using her phone because the Mail app is highly visible on her home screen. In this scenario, Melanie's phone is her trigger.

### AVOID CERTAIN LOCATIONS

Your habits develop a connection to certain locations over time. The older the habit, the stronger the mental association. One of the easiest ways to break a habit is to avoid the physical locations associated with it. It's easier to avoid temptation than to resist it in the moment.

## Example

Before Alison decided to quit smoking, the courtyard was where she would frequently light up. Alison decides to take her lunch break in a different location to avoid being triggered by the courtyard.

### ELIMINATE EXPOSURE TO CUES

A small change in what you see or experience can greatly influence the habits you engage in.

Instead of trying to exercise self-control when temptation arises, your energy is better spent **optimising** or **redesigning your environment** to make good habits easier and bad habits harder.

Identify and remove exposure to cues that trigger your bad habits. Think about the cues that exist at home, work and on your typical travel routes.

## Example

Zoe wants to stop snacking on junk food at night, but her pantry is full of chips and chocolate bars (negative cues) that she doesn't want to throw out. She decides to remove all signs of temptation by donating it to Foodbank.

Worried that she will just stock up again the next time she goes to the supermarket, Zoe decides to avoid the snack aisle (negative cue). She knows that if she doesn't walk down the aisle, she won't see and be tempted by what's available.

Determined to replace her Netflix snacks, Zoe decides to make some healthy treats (positive cues) at the start of the week to satisfy her cravings.

## 2. Craving: Make it Unattractive

Habits are unattractive when they are associated with negative feelings.

### How to make your cravings unattractive

#### HIGHLIGHT THE BENEFITS OF AVOIDANCE

Highlight the benefits of avoiding your bad habits and make the idea of doing nothing more enjoyable.

#### Example

Jason starts work at 7am, but often stays up till 1am. As a result, he rarely feels refreshed. When he considers the benefits of not staying up at 1am (bad habit) and going to bed at 10:00pm (good habit), he comes up with the following: I'll feel more refreshed and alert in the morning which will probably increase my productivity levels at work and help me get a raise. Jason decides to make going to sleep early (doing nothing) more enjoyable by investing in some luxury bedding.

#### Ask yourself

- What are the short and long-term benefits of avoiding my bad habit?
- How can I make “doing nothing” more enjoyable?

#### JOIN THE RIGHT GROUPS

The groups that you are a part of ultimately determine the attractiveness of any given habit which means you will naturally gravitate towards habits that are praised and avoid behaviour that would lower your status. **Nothing sustains motivation better than belonging to a community.**

## Example

Sarah's co-workers have just started a healthy lunch group and nearly everyone in Sarah's workplace is on board. The idea is to take it in turns to prepare a healthy meal for the rest of the group. Since Sarah wants to stop buying fast food for lunch every day, she decides to join the group.

## Ask yourself

- What groups can I physically or virtually join to deter me from my bad habits?

## 3. Routine: Make it Difficult

The more energy and steps a habit requires, the less likely it is to occur.

### How to make your routine difficult

#### IMPLEMENT BARRIERS

Increase the number of steps between you and your bad habit. Since we are motivated to do what is easy, the greater the barrier, the less likely you are to repeat the habit.

#### Example

Sarah wants to reduce her social media usage in the evening. She's tried exercising self-control but it hasn't worked for her in the past. Sarah decides to log out of Instagram and Facebook at 7pm and uses a recurring alarm (time-based trigger) to remind her. This creates one more step in the process of checking social media.

Sarah also recognises that substituting her social media habit with off-screen hobbies is necessary to reduce her boredom in the evening, so she decides to learn guitar.

#### Ask yourself

- What barriers can I implement to make my bad habit an inconvenience to complete?

## AUTOMATE YOUR HABITS

Invest in technology and one-time purchases that lock-in future behaviour, like having a percentage of your paycheck automatically transferred to your savings account. **There are plenty of one-time actions you can take that require little effort to implement, but can make your good habits inevitable and your bad habits impossible.**

Other actions include deleting highly distracting games on your phone, using smaller plates to avoid overeating, choosing the direct debit option for your bills to avoid overdue payments and cancelling your credit cards to avoid overspending.

### Example

Jason wants to save for a house deposit, but his impulse purchases are getting in the way of his savings goal. Manually transferring money into his savings account each month isn't working out for Jason because he either forgets or he transfers his "savings" back into his "everyday" account when he wants to make a big purchase.

To avoid tapping into his savings, Jason takes the following steps:

1. He opens a separate savings account at a different bank. Impulse purchases are mitigated as transferring funds now takes 2-3 business days.
2. He informs the bank he does not need a debit card as he wants to limit access to his savings.
3. He sets up automatic transfers so that each month \$1000 is transferred to his new savings account.

### Ask yourself

- What are some one-time purchases/actions I can take to make my bad habits virtually impossible?
- What technology can I leverage to make my bad habits virtually impossible?

## 4. Reward: Make it Unsatisfying

You are more likely to avoid an experience when the ending is painful. In order to initiate a change in behaviour, the consequences must be immediately felt.

### How to make your reward unsatisfying

#### USE A COMMITMENT DEVICE

As humans, we are primed to respond to negative reinforcement because we want to avoid pain at all costs.

A commitment device is a self-imposed system, like a written habit contract in which you state your commitment to a particular habit and the consequences that will occur if you don't follow through. You'll need to find one or two people to act as your accountability partners and sign off on the contract.

**This is a brilliant way to lock in your good intentions and control future impulsive behaviour.** A commitment device makes your bad habits unattractive by increasing the immediate consequences of your actions.

#### Example

Alison is making her third attempt to quit smoking. Given her unsuccessful attempts, she decides to establish harsh penalties for smoking. Using StickK, she creates a commitment contract with a trusted friend whereby \$500 is donated to an organisation she dislikes every time she smokes a cigarette. She knows she'll be less inclined to light up when it comes at a significant cost.

#### Ask yourself

- What penalties can I implement? Is this an effective deterrent?



# Bonus Tips

## CREATE IF-THEN PLANS

Proactively identifying at-risk situations that could trigger a bad habit enables you to put an if-then plan in place which pulls you out of the habit loop, allowing you to make more conscious decisions.

### Habit intention: stop smoking

**If** my colleagues ask me to join them for a cigarette, **then** I will politely decline and confidently tell them I've quit.

**If** I am feeling stressed at work, **then** I will put on some calming instrumental music, close my eyes for 10 minutes and notice the pace of the music, the sound of each instrument and the shifts in volume.

If you fall off the wagon, remember that it's normal and expected. Use these speedbumps as an opportunity to refine your contingency plans.

### Ask yourself

- What caused me to miss my habit?
- What can I do next time in the same situation?

## MAKE DOING NOTHING SATISFYING

It's difficult to feel satisfied when the benefits of avoiding your bad habits can't be seen. One way to increase the satisfaction of "doing nothing" is to start a reward fund which you could use for travelling or purchasing items on your wishlist.

The idea is to put away how much you would typically spend on your bad habit into this new account. The immediate reward of seeing your savings grow is a form of visual progress that can be incredibly satisfying.

## Example

After working out on average how much she would typically spend on cigarettes each day, Alison starts a reward fund labelled “Canada” and transfers that amount to her new account every day she doesn’t smoke.

## Ask yourself

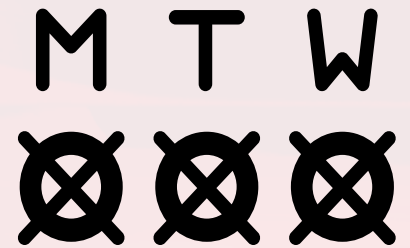
- What could I use my reward fund for?

# Why You Should Track Your Habits

It's easy to lose motivation when there is no proof that you're moving forward. A habit tracker provides clear evidence of your progress and can be a simple yet effective way to trigger and reinforce desired habits.

## Habit Tracking Tools

- Get a calendar and cross off each day you complete your habit
- Use the habit tracker featured in Curation 2020
- [Print a FREE monthly habit tracker here](#)



## The Benefits of a Habit Tracker

### SERVES AS A TRIGGER

Recording your progress builds a series of visual cues. The last recorded action serves as a trigger (reminder) to follow through with your desired habit.

### BOOSTS MOTIVATION

The strongest form of motivation is progress. The habit tracker provides visual proof of your hard work and how far you've come. This feedback can be highly motivating—you won't want to "break the chain" and lose your streak.

### PROVIDES IMMEDIATE SATISFACTION

Ticking off your habits can be immensely satisfying. This ritual reinforces your desired behaviour and keeps your eye on the ball.

## ENHANCES SELF-AWARENESS

Habit trackers make you more mindful of how you are spending your time. You can't lie to yourself if the evidence is right in front of you.

### Warning

It's important to recognise that measurement is only useful when it guides you. Just because you can measure something doesn't mean it's the most effective measure of your behaviour. Don't become so obsessed with the numbers that you lose sight of your big picture goals and intentions.

# How to Review Your Habits

The downside of automatic habits is mindless repetition which can turn into complacency. Setting up a system to review your habits on a weekly or monthly basis will keep you mindful of mistakes and possible paths for improvement.

## Ask yourself

- Can I upgrade my habit? Can I increase the number of reps or time devoted to my habit?

*Emily has been meditating consistently for 5 minutes every day, but she would like to increase her meditation time to 15 minutes. Upon reflection, Emily realises that she still struggles to complete her 5 minute ritual. Instead of upgrading her habit prematurely, Emily decides to focus her energy on mastering 5 minutes of meditation.*

- Am I struggling to complete my habit? Do I need to downsize my habit?

*Jason had ambitious plans to complete three sets of 20 push-ups every morning before work, but has struggled to be consistent with his routine. He decides to implement the two-minute rule. (page 31)*

- How can I improve the way I complete my habit? Am I rushing my reps, just to get it done? Can I streamline my habit?

*Sarah is committed to doing two sets of 20 burpees every morning before work. She's been using her habit tracker to record her progress and she's got a pretty impressive streak. Upon reflection, Sarah notices that her form/ technique isn't as good in the second set because she's rushing it. She realises that if she wakes up 10 minutes earlier, she doesn't need to rush her workout.*

# 7 Tips for Combating Resistance

One of the most common mistakes people make when building new habits is setting unrealistic goals and expectations.

Shooting for a perfect record is more of a deterrent than a realistic and empowering approach to building new habits and breaking old ones.

Play the long game, be patient with yourself and go at a sustainable pace. Slow and steady wins the race.

## PRACTISE SELF-COMPASSION

It's important to accept that you will slip up on your habits, it's part and parcel of coding them into your daily routine. Treat days you mess up as experiments and learning curves. By writing down the factors that caused you to struggle, you can better prepare for them when they show up next.

## USE "BUT" TO INTERRUPT YOUR THOUGHTS

When you find yourself stuck in a negative headspace, use the word "but" to interrupt your train of thought.

"I'm not good at this, BUT, if I work at it, I will see improvements."

## START SMALL

Instead of starting with a 20 minute meditation practice, start with one minute. The idea is to make it so easy that you can't say no in the beginning.

## LEVERAGE THE COMPOUND EFFECT

Increase your habit by a tiny amount each day. Using the same example above, start with 60 seconds of meditation on day one and increase this by one minute every day.

## BREAK DOWN BIG HABITS

If you continue employing the compound effect, you'll notice a dramatic improvement in the first couple of months. However, it's important to keep your habits easy and reasonable to alleviate resistance. If it starts to feel like too much, break down your habits into more manageable blocks. Perhaps 10 minutes of meditation in the morning and 10 minutes in the evening is more realistic than 20 minutes in one session.

## NEVER MISS TWICE

Adhering to the “never miss twice” rule involves getting yourself back on track as quickly as possible when you fail. The goal here is to avoid missing two days in a row.

Forget the “all or nothing” mentality and leverage the power of showing up. Showing up allows you to practise your habit. Showing up allows you to get your “reps” in.

Ultimately, what counts is not how many mistakes you've made in the process, but how many times you've shown up to perform your habit.

# The Procrastination Trap

There is a big difference between motion and action. Motion focuses on preparation while action focuses on repetition.

Some level of preparation is helpful as long as it doesn't turn into procrastination.

Contrary to popular opinion, it doesn't take a magical number of days to form a habit.

**Habits form based on frequency, not time. What counts is how many times you have performed the habit.**

To build a habit, you need to practise it. Ultimately, putting in the reps is the most important step you can take in encoding a new habit.



# Further Reading

**THE POWER OF HABIT BY CHARLES DUHIGG**

**THE SLIGHT EDGE BY JEFF OLSON**

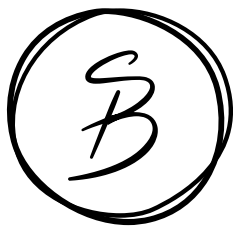
**ATOMIC HABITS BY JAMES CLEAR**

# You have the capacity to change your habits

You can make new choices and decisions that are consistent with the person you want to be and the life you want to live. It's always easier with a community behind you, so let's do this together.

## Connect with us here





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