

Building Healthy Habits

Reference: *Atomic Habits* by James Clear

We overestimate the power of one big, defining moment (think New Year's Resolutions) and underestimate the power of tiny, gradual, repetitive actions. The small things we do unconsciously every day have a huge impact in the long run, positive or negative.

Our most common pitfall is expecting immediate results. We try to uphold a resolution, slip up (which is inevitable), and then decide to stop because the goal seems unachievable. **"You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems."** Our daily rituals, routines, and habits are what we will always fall back on, what will ultimately determine the path our life is taking.

The way we think about ourselves in the face of habit-forming matters. If you want to become a writer, *decide that you are a writer and write every day*, no matter how good or bad what you write is. If you decide you want to exercise to lose weight, but still identify as "too big", you're defeating yourself before you can even start. Instead, decide: *"I am a healthy person who makes decisions for my body that feel good."* You're far more likely to exercise because it boosts your mood than for numbers on a scale (because diets fail 95% of the time anyway). **Decide the type of person you want to be and prove it to yourself with small wins.**

How to Create a Good Habit:

1. Make it obvious.
 - a. Fill out this sentence: I will [do this] at [this time] in [this place]. Example: I will meditate for one minute at 7am in my kitchen.
 - b. Be aware of your environment. Want to do yoga? Have the mat in a place where you can see it. Don't want to eat chips? Don't buy them or store them somewhere hard to reach.
 - c. Remember that people with the best self-control are those who need to use it least.
2. Make it attractive.
 - a. After doing the habit that you need to form, reward yourself with something you want. After I work out, I will have a cup of my favourite tea and watch a show.
 - b. Surround yourself with people who support the habits you want to form. Humans imitate each other by nature, make it work in your favour.
 - c. Notice the underlying motives to your cravings (connection, nourishment, reduced stress, etc.) and replace unhealthy habits with healthier ones that satisfy the same basic need.
3. Make it easy.
 - a. Quantity over quality. "The best is the enemy of the good." Don't aim for habits with metrics to be the best, *just aim to do them every single day.*
 - b. Habits form based on frequency, not time. Do it lots and it becomes instinct.

- c. Start small. Aiming to do one push up a day or to write one page a day is a lot more manageable than trying to do an hour-long workout or write an entire chapter. These small wins build confidence and lay the foundation for growth. Habit not sticking? Make it even smaller until it becomes manageable.
 - d. Set yourself up for success. Turn off notifications on your phone, set up automatic bill payments, make regular medical appointments. Preparing things ahead of time makes the task easier when it's time to do it.
4. Make it satisfying.
- a. Make an immediate reward that aligns with your desired habit. Get nice smelling soap to entice you to shower every morning, make a playlist that you love to move to, choose food that tastes good to make preparing it more satisfying.
 - b. Try habit tracking. Seeing a calendar filled with red x's on every day you did the habit lets us feel proud of our progress and motivates us to keep at it.
 - c. Do it on the days that aren't satisfying. Consistency is key, even if it's not perfect. If you want to eat more homemade meals, eat a peanut butter sandwich instead of ordering out. This keeps our momentum and builds that confidence.
 - d. Recover quickly. If you do miss a day or slip up, be compassionate with yourself. One missed day is inevitable, two missed days builds an opposite habit. Know that mistakes are expected, dust yourself up, and get back on track.
 - e. Track purpose instead of numbers. The numbers don't matter, whether you did 20 push-ups or cleaned 3 rooms. Did it improve your mood? Did it make you show up the way you want to in life? If a habit makes you miserable, re-evaluate. If you want to move your body every day, try a different type of movement that feels better. Don't commit yourself to something for the sake of it, commit because it has a purpose in your life.

Journaling for Purpose

A good way to cement our desired identity and build intention/resolve is to sit down every day for a few minutes to write about our day and our hopes. If we are committed, mindful, and intentional about the life we want to lead, it is easier to keep up the habits that align with those values and aspirations.

Each day, use these prompts to be mindful about where you are and where you want to be:

- What went well today?
- What didn't go so well today?
- What did I learn today?
- What made me smile today?
- What am I working towards?
- What can I do a little bit better tomorrow than I did today?