



Building Habits for the Lives We Want

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How do we walk more, make time for hobbies, meditate more, change diets, use the CPAP, work more, or work less? Have you brushed your teeth today? How is that painting coming along? The world is full of these questions, and all too often so are our doctor's visits. Habit formation is one of the most crucial aspects of our daily living. At the same time, it can be one of the most difficult things in our lives to change. A habit, once formed, never truly goes away. Instead, we must find ways to change it, to create a new pattern of behavior that works better for us.

FACTS ABOUT HABITS

- A habit is a behavior that repeats itself, is cued by specific situations in our lives, often happens outside of our awareness, and is acquired through repetition.

- Once a habit is formed, the task takes significantly less time and energy to complete. Our brain must exert effort for novel tasks, but a habit happens more automatically and therefore becomes less taxing.
- As much as 40% of what we do every day is repeated habits that we have learned.
- Changing a habit takes, on average, 66 days of ongoing effort.

TOOLS FOR HABIT CHANGE

Connect Habits to Values: Values are our motivations for what we do in life. A value can be our desire to be a loving parent, to be healthy enough to chase our grandchildren, our love of good music, and so much more. Research shows behavior change works better when it is "in pursuit of" something meaningful, instead of "running from" something difficult. Behavior change is best when driven by "I want to..." and not "I should be..."

Build Awareness: The first step of habit reversal training is habit awareness. Habits, by nature, often happen without full awareness. Practice "naming" the experience, such as "Ah, I want to skip the gym again" without judgment. Keep a habit log and engage in non-judgmental self-reflection.

Track Progress: Use a post-it note on the wall every time you walk, a ping-pong ball in a bucket every time you paint, a check on a pad of paper each time you remember an important daily task—each of

these can help motivate you. Habit trackers can be found online, through smartphone applications, or paper journals. Just make sure the habit tracker does not end up taking more time than the habit itself! (Unless, of course, decorating habit journals is your desired habit).



Avoid Punishment and Self-Criticism:

Do you work hard for critical, harsh, and cruel supervisors? Be the type of boss to yourself you'd want to have. Habit change can be hard, so practice compassion and patience with yourself whenever possible.

Set SMART Goals: Set goals that are *Specific* (say exactly what you'll do), *Meaningful* (connected to your values), *Adaptive* (helpful to your life), *Realistic* (within your means to do), and *Time-Bound* (set a schedule). "I'll take this exact action on Tuesdays and Thursdays" is significantly more effective than "I'll get to that eventually."

Plan for Setbacks: Everybody fails at times when trying to change habits. A setback does not mean the habit is a failure; it means you may need to try additional strategies. Should you find yourself truly stuck, consider extra support. Self-help materials such as books can be excellent resources, friends and family may be enlisted as social supports, and a therapist can become an ally to work toward a specific goal.

Practice Patience and Trust: Change does not occur in a three-day overhaul. It comes from small steps sustained over time. Don't overdo it! It's better to take small steps than to burn yourself out over a weekend. Set a goal and ask yourself how likely you will meet it on a zero to 10 scale. If it is five or less, make the goal smaller (tool credited to Russ Harris). Trust in your willingness and ability to see your goal out to the end, and have patience in allowing it to happen over the time frame needed for you to be truly successful. Habit change is an endurance run, not a sprint.

Sources: Stoewen DL. *Dimensions of wellness: Change your habits, change your life.* Can Vet J. 2017 Aug;58(8)
 Claiborn, J., & Pedrick, C. (2007). *The habit change workbook: How to break bad habits and form good ones.* New Harbinger Publications.

Stay Physically Active this Summer

With warmer weather finally here, it's the perfect time to switch up your old workout routine and embrace the outdoors. Staying active year-round is important for both physical and mental wellness, and there's no shortage of exciting outdoor activities to help you do just that.

Here are a few creative ways to stay active while enjoying the outdoors this summer:

Take a Stroll

Whether it's taking the dog for a walk around the neighborhood or enjoying a morning stroll at your local farmers market, walking is a great and easy way to soak up some vitamin D and positively impact your overall health.

Plant a Garden

From squatting and bending to tend to plants, to lifting, reaching, and twisting to pull weeds, gardening not only gives you beautiful blooms and fresh produce but also doubles as a rewarding workout.

Enjoy the Water

Activities on the lake, river, or in the pool are great ways to get some exercise while staying cool during these hot summer months. Dive in and go swimming, paddleboarding, kayaking, or canoeing.

Explore Nature

Explore the beauty of the great outdoors while getting great exercise by going for a hike, bike ride, outdoor rock climb, trail run, or even moving your workouts outside.

Try a Sport

Sports are a great way to incorporate fun into your exercise routine. Joining a pickleball league, playing a round of golf, or even throwing around a frisbee all provide you with a great workout while connecting you with other people.

Source: <https://www.dhs.gov/employee-resources/blog/2021/07/15/stay-physically-active-summer>

WATCH FOR HEAT STROKE

As we head into the summer months, temperatures begin to rise, and with it comes the increased risk of heatstroke. Heatstroke is a condition caused by your body overheating, usually due to prolonged exposure to, or physical exertion in high temperatures. The most serious form of heat injury can occur if your body temperature rises to 104°F (40°C) or higher.

Heatstroke can occur in two ways: non-exertional and exertional. Non-exertional heatstroke is brought on by exposure to a hot environment for a prolonged period, while exertional heatstroke is caused by an increase in core body temperature due to exercise or work in hot weather. In either case, these conditions can be brought on by factors such as wearing excess clothing, drinking alcohol, or becoming dehydrated.

In most cases, heatstroke is non-severe if promptly and adequately treated, but it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms to help prevent severe complications. High body temperature, altered mental state, rapid breathing, flushed skin, or nausea and vomiting are all signs and symptoms of heatstroke. If you or someone else exhibits these symptoms, it's important to take immediate action to cool down the body and seek medical attention.

Because heatstroke is easily preventable and predictable, taking these steps during hot weather can help reduce its risk:



Wear loose-fitting, lightweight clothing



Protect against sunburn



Take a cool shower



Drink plenty of fluids



Limit outdoor time

By staying informed about heatstroke and its preventive measures, you can reduce the risk of heat injuries and make the most of the warm weather ahead.

Source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heat-stroke/symptoms-causes/syc-20353581>



WHY PREVENTIVE CARE IS VITAL

Preventive care is essential as you get older as it plays a critical role in maintaining your health, independence, and quality of life. As individuals age, they become more susceptible to chronic illnesses, disabilities, and complications from minor health issues, making proactive health management crucial. Here's a look into a few examples of preventive care:



ANNUAL WELLNESS EXAMS

Based on your risk factors, age, lifestyle, and family history, your doctor may order various blood tests and screenings during your annual wellness exam, such as blood pressure, cholesterol, osteoporosis, and BMI checks. These tests can identify underlying conditions like heart disease and diabetes, even without symptoms, and help your doctor recommend follow-up testing and lifestyle, exercise, or diet changes to improve or maintain your health.



IMMUNIZATION VACCINATIONS

Adults need to keep their vaccines up to date to prevent dangerous diseases. Your doctor will review your vaccination history and risk factors and may recommend immunizations including flu vaccine (recommended each year for most people aged 6 months and older), pneumonia vaccine, shingles vaccine, and hepatitis B vaccine (for people with diabetes or other conditions that affects the immune system).



CANCER SCREENINGS

Keeping up with routine cancer screenings can increase your chances of detecting cancer in the earliest stages when it's most treatable. Your doctor may recommend cancer screenings including those for skin cancer, breast cancer, cervical cancer, colon cancer, prostate cancer, or lung cancer. Since cancer screening recommendations are always being evaluated and updated, it's best to talk with your doctor about what's best for you.



OBESITY SCREENING AND COUNSELING

If you're trying to achieve a healthy weight, your doctor can provide some guidance as you consider your options and choose the best approach. This could include reviewing your body mass index (BMI) with you and identifying other potential health risks.



TYPE 2 DIABETES SCREENING

Diabetes can cause many health problems, and once you have diabetes, it can only be managed—not cured. The good news is that it's preventable. A healthy diet and regular exercise to maintain a healthy weight are essential to diabetes prevention.



MENTAL HEALTH SCREENINGS

Your doctor may ask if you're experiencing symptoms of common mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety. If you have concerns about your mental health, your doctor may refer you to a specialist.

Preventive care is essential for your health and well-being. Prioritizing regular check-ups, screenings, and healthy lifestyle choices, can help detect and manage potential health issues before they become serious, leading to a healthier more active life. To maintain routine care, both office visits and eligible telehealth visits are encouraged, ensuring that you receive the necessary attention and guidance to support your overall health.





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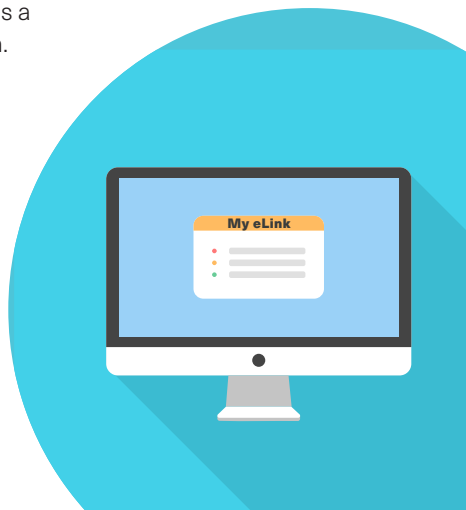
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