Habits and Small Habit Changes: How They Can Change Your Life!

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We first make our habits, and then our habits make us
- attributed to John Dryden
Definition

**Habit...**

is any regularly repeated behavior that requires little or no thought *(nearly or completely involuntary or automatic)* and is learned rather than innate. A habit is generally developed through reinforcement and repetition.
Why Are Habits Important?

~ 45% of our reported activities in a given day are habitual (Wood et al, 2002)
Why Are Habits Important?

- Habits represent regularity and “best responses” to contexts
Why Are Habits Important?

- Habits may help us maintain healthy behaviors in the face of lagging motivation
Habits contribute to our sense of continuity or “flow” (not interrupted by stopping to make decisions)
Historical Advice on Habits

William James (1842-1910)

Houghton Library
Harvard University
Habits and Behavior

Cue -> Routine -> Reward -> Habit

Carson
$S \rightarrow R(A) \rightarrow O$

$R(A) = \text{Routine}$

$S = \text{Cue}$

$\text{Reward} = O$
Habits and Biology: Goal Directed versus Habitual Pathways in the Brain

Adapted from Smith & Graybiel (2014)
Habitual Behavior: Both Physical and Mental

Examples of Physical Behaviors

- Smoking
- Driving
- Brushing teeth
- Shaving/applying makeup
- Playing a musical piece
Habitual Behavior: Both Physical and Mental

Examples of Mental Behaviors

- Automatic thoughts
- Self-talk
- Prejudice (prejudgments based on cues)
- Automatic emotional responses
Habitual Behavior: Both Physical and Mental

Negative Habits May Contribute to:
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Stress-related illness

Negative Habits May Contribute to:
- Depression
- Eating Disorders
- OCD
- Addiction
Stress and Habits

- Stress can reduce reward sensitivity (Ehlers & Todd, 2017)
- Habits form more rapidly during and immediately after a state of stress
- Individuals are more likely to revert to habitual behavior when stressed
- Developing good habits helps ensure positive outcomes during times of stress
Habits, Attitudes, and Behavior
Adriaanse et al. (2014); Gall & Duckworth (2015)

- Self-control requires less effort when habits are strong
- Will power to resist poor choices is stronger when positive habits are strong
- Self-control may aid in developing positive habits
Habits, Attitudes, and Behavior
Adriaanse et al. (2014); Gall & Duckworth (2015)

- Self-control requires less effort when habits are strong
- Will power to resist poor choices is stronger when positive habits are strong
- Self-control may aid in developing positive habits

Habits can work to bolster will power!
Forming Good Habits
Tips for Forming/Changing Your Habit

- Start with something small
The Importance of a Small Change
The Importance of a Small Change

Weight Loss from Drinking Two Cups of Coffee per Day Black vs. with Half & Half

Number of pounds

- 1 day: 0.02 pounds
- 1 month: 0.63 pounds
- 1 year: 7 pounds
- 5 years: 35 pounds
The Importance of a Small Change

Weight Loss from Drinking Two Cups of Coffee per Day Black vs. with Half & Half

Number of pounds

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40

1 day 1 month 1 year 5 years

0.02 0.63 7 35
Research-Inspired Ideas for Small Habit Changes

Brain and Health-related Habits

- Balance exercise daily
- Strength exercise daily
- Aerobic exercise daily
- Omega-3 supplement daily
- Multivitamin daily
- 6 glasses of water daily
- Substitute olive oil for butter
- Drink coffee and tea black (no cream or sugar)

- Regular bed time each day
- 7 or more hours sleep daily
- Make contact with an acquaintance daily
- Read an article about a new topic daily
- Practice a new skill daily
- Slow abdominal breathing twice a day
- Meditate for 5-10 minutes daily
- Write in a journal for 10 minutes a day
Research-Inspired Ideas for Small Habit Changes

Mental Health-related Habits

- Begin each day with gratitude journal or affirmation
- Perform one random act of kindness per day
- Turn complaints into compliments
- Use anger cues to take calming action
- Use stress cues to take calming action
- Monitor self-talk each day
- Replace negative self-talk with more realistic phrases each day
- Hold up a stop sign when you hear negative automatic thoughts each day
Research-Inspired Ideas for Small Habit Changes

Success-related Habits

- Make your bed daily
- Each morning write down 2 goals to accomplish today
- Wake up at 6 am or earlier each day
- Begin meaningful work before looking at social media each day
Tips for Forming/Changing Your Habit

- Start with something small
- Use the S-R-O model
Tips for Forming/Changing Your Habit

- Start with something small
- Use the S-R-O model
- Small rewards leading to a larger reward
Our Plan to Form Good Habits

- The *Token Economy* Contingency Plan

  immediate gratification  +  pleasurable delayed reward
Our Plan to Form Good Habits

- The *Token Economy* Contingency Plan
Habit Chart

HABIT NAME

10 push-ups

SEPTEMBER 2019

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat
1  2  3  4  5  6  7
8  9 10 11 12 13 14
15 16 17 18 19 20 21
22 23 24 25 26 27 28
29 30  1  2  3  4  5
Habit Chart

Habit Name: 10 push-ups

September 2019 Calendar:

- Dates marked with 'X' indicate days the habit was accomplished.
- The habit was not marked for the 29th and 30th of September.
Tips for Forming/Changing Your Habit

- Start with something small
- Use the S-R-O model
- Small rewards leading to a larger reward
- Cue off a behavior you already do
Cue off a Current Behavior
Tips for Forming/Changing Your Habit

- Start with something small
- Use the S-R-O model
- Small rewards leading to a larger reward
- Cue off a behavior you already do
- Make your cue visible and unavoidable
Cue off a Current Behavior
Tips for Forming/Changing Your Habit

- Start with something small
- Use the S-R-O model
- Small rewards leading to a larger reward
- Cue off a behavior you already do
- Make your cue visible and unavoidable
- Allow for set-backs (be kind to yourself!)
Allow for Set-Backs
Tips for Forming/Changing Your Habit

- Start with something small
- Use the S-R-O model
- Small rewards leading to a larger reward
- Cue off a behavior you already do
- Make your cue visible and unavoidable
- Allow for set-backs (be kind to yourself!)
- Persist!
HABITS ARE ~ 45% OF YOUR DAILY LIFE

POSITIVE HABITS GET YOU THROUGH TIMES OF STRESS

SMALL POSITIVE HABITS WILL LEAD TO BIG REWARDS OVER TIME

FORMING NEW HABITS DOES NOT HAVE TO TAKE LOADS OF WILL POWER!

Summing up:
Thank you!

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