

# How to Make Your Habits Work for You

Your habits have far-reaching implications. They affect your well-being. Since they are so important, you need to set them up to succeed. There are many ways you can influence your habits, such as pursuing activities you are passionate about, setting realistic and attainable goals, and practicing mindfulness.

Your habits also affect your productivity. If you are working a 9-to-5 job, creating a morning routine is beneficial. That may mean waking up early to exercise, meditate, or spend a few minutes thinking through your day ahead.

If you spend a lot of time on social media, ask yourself why. Are you just trying to distract yourself from your to-do list? Do you find yourself scrolling through Facebook mindlessly?

If so, it may be worth limiting your screen time. You can also choose to block certain websites on your computer. Regardless, it's always essential to make your habits work for you.

# So How Can You Let Your Habits Help You Rather Than Draw You Back? Consider These Tips:

1. Draw a habit loop for the behavior you want to change. For example, let's say you want to quit smoking. You keep fiddling with your lighter when you're trying to relax. Do this instead: pull out your phone and browse the internet when you're bored. Each time you do this, you're reinforcing your habit.
  - ◆ A habit loop is like a loop of reinforcement, and it's there to help encourage you to keep repeating a behavior.
  - ◆ Just as paying attention to your eating habits causes you to pick up better diets and healthier eating habits, paying attention to other behaviors will help you form new healthy habits.
2. Pile your habits on top of each other. One of the most effective ways to form a new habit is to link it with an older one.

- ◆ For example, let's say you want to go to the gym after work. If you have a habit of driving home from work, you could pile your habit onto that. Instead of driving home, you could find a gym on your way home from work.
  - ◆ That way, even if you've fallen off the wagon, you can still go to the gym after work.
3. **Let your new behavior match your identity.** There's a big difference between telling people, "I'm trying to quit," and telling them, "Sorry. I don't smoke!" The difference lies in your self-image.
- ◆ A person who sees himself as trying to quit still feels the old habit is part of him. He still associates himself with the pattern he means to stop.
  - ◆ On the other hand, the person who says he doesn't smoke aligns with the habit he wants to incorporate. That mental shift makes all the difference.
4. **Baby steps are the key to winning your battle.** A Stanford University researcher observed that a significant change in behavior needs high motivation levels. But we don't need research to tell us that we need more motivation to make substantial changes.

- ◆ That's why it's best to take baby steps. **Make small changes to your behavior**, like cutting back on your drinking once or twice a week. Once you see those changes, you'll have the confidence to keep building on them.

5. **Reward yourself with something else.** A bad habit is difficult to break because it gives us some reward. For example, gamblers enjoy the thrill of winning (or losing) money. These rewards are strong enough to keep them hooked.

- ◆ **The best way to resist temptation is to make a substitution.** When the craving for nicotine or high-calorie food comes, substitute it with something else.

**Remember: habits are powerful.** They're the ground crew that keeps our aircraft in the air. If you want to keep your habits working for you, take these tips and make them part of your routine.