

Building New Habits

Differentiate between goals and habits. Goals are outcomes, such as “getting healthy.” Habits are the actions you take to achieve a goal. For example, eating vegetables with each meal and exercising every day.

Start with small changes. Make incremental changes toward the behavior you want, and work your way up from there. Even if you improve at something only 1% every week, the changes that accumulate over months or years are massive.

Update your environment. Make changes that encourage your new habit and discourage unwanted habits. If you would like to eat healthier, keep a bowl of fruit on the counter, and put unhealthy snacks out of sight.

Tie new habits to other activities. Make a plan using the format: “After ____, I will ____.” For example: “After each meal, I will read for 5 minutes.” This is a simple way to remember your habit each day and encourage consistency.

Some practice is better than no practice. Even if you don’t have a lot of time or energy, do *something* toward building your habit. Too tired for a long walk? Walk for 5 minutes. Too busy to read a whole chapter? Read one page. Consistency builds habits.

Tell someone you’re starting a new habit. Doing so creates accountability and makes it more difficult to back out of your commitment. Also, once others know you’re working toward a goal, they may offer encouragement and support.

Track your habit. Keep a journal, calendar, or spreadsheet to record your habit each time you practice. It can be satisfying to record your behavior, and to look back and see all the hard work you’ve put in. Plus, it can be motivating to keep a habit streak alive.

Celebrate your successes. Healthy habits tend to have long-term benefits that take time to kick in. While you’re waiting for these, give yourself immediate, small rewards to sustain motivation. Just make sure they don’t contradict your goals.