

Participant Guide

Build Better Habits



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Overview

Creating healthy lifestyle habits is essential for improving your well-being and achieving long-term success. Whether it's eating better, exercising more, or managing stress, developing strong habits makes it easier to stay on track. But how do you create habits that stick? In this module, we'll explore strategies like Health Habit Loops and Habit Stacking to help you make lasting changes.



What is a Habit?

A habit is something you do automatically, without much thought. Habits form through repetition. For example, brushing your teeth every morning is likely a habit you don't even think about. The more often you repeat an action, the more naturally it becomes part of your routine.

Habits can be positive, like exercising daily or flossing your teeth, or negative, like biting your nails or eating too much processed food. Developing good habits can improve your health, increase productivity, and boost overall well-being. Once a habit is formed, it takes less effort to maintain, helping you stay consistent in areas like fitness, diet, or time management.



Helpful Versus Unhelpful Habits

The habits you choose can either support your goals or hold you back. The great thing is, you have the power to decide which habits you want to keep and which ones you want to change. Let's explore how the habits you choose can shape your life and how you can create ones that help you grow.

Recognize Habits That Support Your Goals:

Some habits help you live your best life. These are the actions that make you feel energized, healthy, and focused. For example, getting regular exercise, staying organized, or setting aside time for self-care are habits that can help you reach your full potential. Think about the habits you already have that make you feel proud of yourself and motivated.



Helpful Versus Unhelpful Habits

Identify Habits That Hold You Back:

There might be some habits that keep you from achieving your goals. But instead of seeing these as failures, look at them as opportunities for growth. Whether it's spending too much time on social media or putting off important tasks, recognizing these habits is the first step to replacing them with ones that lift you up.

Your Power to Choose:

You are in control of your habits. If a habit doesn't support your goals, you have the power to change it. Imagine how your life will look and feel when you make choices that align with your dreams. Every new day gives you a chance to choose habits that will move you closer to your best self.

Transforming Unhelpful Habits

We all have habits that may slow us down or keep us from reaching our full potential. The good news is that you have the power to change any habit and replace it with something better. Here's how you can take control and transform unhelpful habits into positive, life-changing ones.

1. Identify the Habit:

The first step to transformation is recognizing the habit you want to change. This awareness is powerful! By identifying the habit, like spending too much time on your phone or skipping breakfast, you're already taking charge of your future.

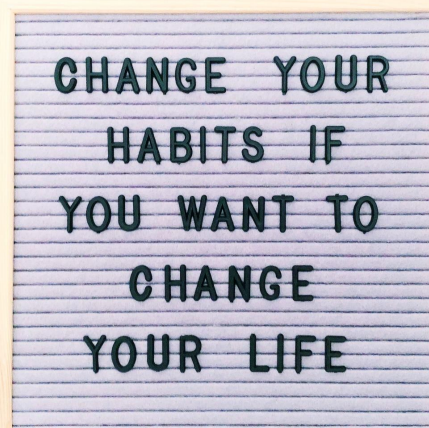
2. Understand Your Habit Loop:

Every habit follows a pattern: a cue (what triggers the habit), the action (what you do), and the reward (how it makes you feel). Understanding this loop gives you control. For example, if boredom (the cue) makes you snack (the action), you can swap it out for something healthier, like drinking water or taking a quick walk. You're the one who gets to decide!

Transforming Unhelpful Habits

3. Replace, Don't Erase:

It's easier to replace an unhelpful habit than to try and stop it completely. Think of it as upgrading your routine. If you want to stop watching TV late at night, try swapping it with reading a book or enjoying a calming activity that helps you relax. You're not losing something; you're gaining something better!



The Health Habit Loop

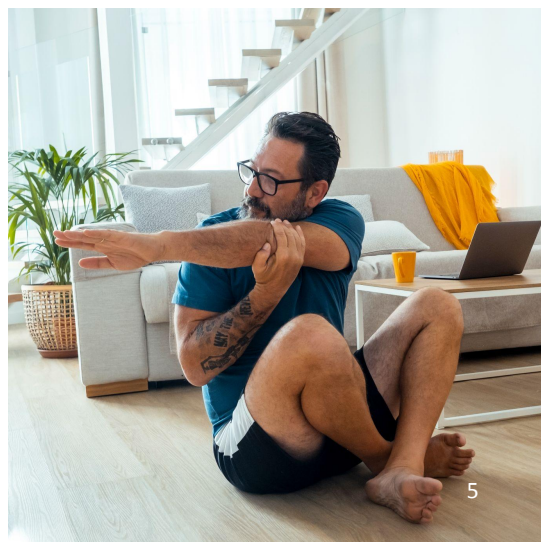
One helpful strategy for building healthy habits is understanding the Health Habit Loop. This loop consists of three parts:

1. **Cue (Reminder):** This is what triggers the habit. For example, if you want to start drinking more water, your cue could be feeling thirsty or seeing a water bottle.
2. **Routine (Action):** This is the habit itself. In this case, drinking a glass of water would be the action.
3. **Reward:** After completing the action, there's a reward. It could be feeling refreshed or knowing you've met your hydration goal for the day.

Example:

- **Cue:** You wake up in the morning and see your workout clothes laid out.
- **Routine:** You do a 10-minute workout.
- **Reward:** You feel energized and proud of yourself for starting your day with exercise.

Follow these three steps repeatedly. Over time, the action will feel automatic, and you'll be more likely to stick with it.



Habit Stacking

Habit Stacking is another powerful technique. It's based on linking a new habit to one you already do regularly. When you pair the two actions, the first habit acts as a trigger for the new one.

Example:

If you already brush your teeth every morning, you could add a short stretching routine right after brushing. Eventually, stretching will become just as automatic as brushing your teeth because it's linked to a habit you already do.

Steps to Habit Stacking:

1. Identify an existing habit you do daily (e.g., brushing your teeth, eating breakfast).
2. Decide on a small, healthy habit to add right after it (e.g., stretching, a short walk).
3. Repeat the routine every day until it becomes automatic.

Other examples of habit stacking:

Plan Your Weekly Menu After Your Morning Coffee or Tea on Saturdays

- **Existing Habit:** Drinking your morning coffee or tea on Saturday morning.
- **New Habit:** Spend 10-15 minutes planning your meals for the upcoming week right after finishing your coffee.
- **Why it Works:** You're already enjoying a peaceful, routine moment, so adding a small task like menu planning feels less overwhelming. It sets you up for a week of healthy eating without needing extra time.

Prep Meals Right After Grocery Shopping

- **Existing Habit:** Putting away groceries after shopping.
- **New Habit:** After unpacking groceries, set aside 15-20 minutes to prep ingredients (wash and chop vegetables, cook grains, portion proteins) for the week's meals.
- **Why it Works:** Since you're already handling food, adding meal prep into your routine immediately after grocery shopping makes it easy to get ahead for the week.

Habit Stacking

Walk After Lunch

- **Existing Habit:** Finishing lunch.
- **New Habit:** After eating lunch, go for a 10-15 minute walk around your neighborhood, workplace, or even indoors.
- **Why it Works:** Linking a walk to the end of lunch helps you digest your food and adds light physical activity to your day without needing to carve out additional time.



Roman's Story



Roman had always wanted to live a healthier life, but with work and family, it seemed hard to start. So, he decided to focus on small habits he could easily fit into his routine. After learning about habit stacking and the Health Habit Loop, he felt ready to make some changes.

First, Roman looked at his mornings. As he waited for his coffee to brew (**the cue**), he added a few stretches (**the action**), which helped him feel more energized (**the reward**) before the day began.

Roman's Story (continued...)

Next, Roman wanted to get better at meal planning for his family. Every Sunday, after doing the dishes **(the cue)**, he and his wife sat down to plan meals for the week. The **action** of planning together made dinner time less stressful, and the **reward** was knowing they'd have healthy meals ready for their busy week.

Lastly, Roman and his wife worked on improving breakfast. The night before, they prepped healthy options like fruit or overnight oats. When the kids came downstairs in the morning **(the cue)**, breakfast was ready and easy to grab, making mornings less rushed **(the reward)**.

Over time, these small habits started to add up. Roman realized that by using habit stacking and understanding the Health Habit Loop, he could make positive changes for his entire family without feeling overwhelmed. Little by little, their new routines became second nature, and they all felt healthier and more organized.



Now, let's discuss...

What small, healthy habits could you stack onto an existing routine, like Roman did with stretching and meal planning?

Roman's family worked together to improve their habits. How can involving others—family, friends, or coworkers—help you stay accountable in your own habit-building journey?

Summary

Consistency is key to building helpful habits. Aim to practice your new habits regularly, even if it's just a little each day. Progress is a journey, and every small step counts. Celebrate your achievements along the way, as each success can boost your confidence and commitment to your goals.

By using techniques like habit stacking and understanding the Health Habit Loop, you can make small changes that add up to significant results. Remember to acknowledge your progress; every time you stick with your new habits, you're becoming a stronger, healthier version of yourself.

Keep Moving



Set a timer for every hour during your day to remind yourself to move! When the timer goes off, take a quick 5-minute break to stretch, walk around, or do some light exercises like squats or lunges. This not only keeps your body active but also boosts your energy and focus throughout the day.

***“Success is the sum
of small efforts,
repeated day in and
day out.”***

— Robert Collier



Summary

Activities

- Complete the attached **"My Habit Reflection Guide"** to reflect on your current habits and identify areas where you'd like to make positive changes. Take your time as you fill it out and consider both your existing habits and your future goals.
- Complete the attached **"My Habit Stacking Plan"** worksheet to help you incorporate new healthy habits into your routine. Follow the prompts and fill in your answers on a separate sheet of paper or in your notebook!
- **Goal Setting:** Set one goal related to this session. For example: "I will add a 10-minute stretching routine after brushing my teeth every morning for the next 30 days to improve flexibility and build a consistent daily habit."

Discussion/Questions

- What small, realistic habits could you start today that align with your long-term health goals?
- What strategies can you use to overcome challenges or barriers to building new habits? Explore ways to stay on track even when motivation is low or when life gets busy.
- How can you adjust your environment to make habit creation easier? What changes could you make to remove barriers to success? Delve into how tweaking your surroundings can support your new habits, whether it's rearranging spaces, minimizing distractions, or using visual cues.

My Habit Reflection Guide

This worksheet will help you think about your current habits and identify which ones you want to change or improve.

Part 1: List Your Habits

Write down three habits you currently have:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Part 2: Helpful or Unhelpful?

For each habit you listed above, decide if it's helpful or unhelpful.

1. _____ (Helpful/Unhelpful)
2. _____ (Helpful/Unhelpful)
3. _____ (Helpful/Unhelpful)

Part 3: Setting Goals for Change

- Choose one unhelpful habit you want to change. Write down your goal for improving this habit.
 - Unhelpful Habit: _____
 - Goal: _____
- Think about a helpful habit you want to strengthen or start. Write it down.
 - New Helpful Habit: _____

Part 4: Action Plan

List two or three steps you can take to reach your goals for change.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The Health Habit Loop Diagram

Below is a simple diagram of the Health Habit Loop. Each part of the loop plays an important role in building a new habit.



Fill in Your Health Habit Loop

Think about a habit you want to build. Use the spaces below to identify the **Cue**, **Action**, and **Reward** related to that habit.

1. **Cue:** What will remind you to start this habit?
2. **Action:** What is the specific action you will take to build this habit?
3. **Reward:** What is the reward for completing the action?

Health Habit Loop Examples

Example 1: Exercising Regularly

- **Cue:** Set a reminder on your phone for 5 PM.
- **Action:** Go for a 30-minute walk or jog.
- **Reward:** Treat yourself to a relaxing bath or your favorite show afterward.

Example 2: Reducing Screen Time

- **Cue:** Set a timer for 30 minutes before your desired screen-free time.
- **Action:** Spend that time doing a non-screen activity like reading, crafting, or going for a walk.
- **Reward:** Experience mental clarity and peace of mind after taking a break from screens.

Example 3: Getting More Sleep

- **Cue:** Set a bedtime alarm for 9:30 PM.
- **Action:** Go to bed by 10 PM every night.
- **Reward:** Feel well-rested and more focused during the day after getting a good night's sleep.

Example 4: Meditating Daily

- **Cue:** Leave your meditation mat in a visible spot in your room.
- **Action:** Meditate for 10 minutes every morning after waking up.
- **Reward:** Feel calm and centered, starting your day with a clear mind.



My Healthy Habit Stacking Plan

This handout will guide you in creating a Habit Stacking Plan specifically designed for healthy habits. By linking new healthy habits like eating well and staying active to existing routines, you can make positive changes easier to maintain.

How to Use This Handout:

- **Identify an Existing Habit:** Think of a habit you already do regularly.
- **Choose a New Healthy Habit:** Select a healthy habit you'd like to develop.
- **Fill in Your Responses:** Write down your answers on a separate sheet of paper or in your notebook.

1. Existing Healthy Habit:

What is a healthy habit you already practice?

2. New Healthy Habit:

What new healthy habit do you want to add to your routine?

3. Stacking Strategy:

Describe how you will connect the new healthy habit to the existing one.

4. Reminder Tip:

How will you remind yourself to do the new habit after the existing one?

5. Visual Cue:

What can you place nearby to remind you?

6. Progress Tracker:

How will you track your progress? (e.g., journal, app, checklist)

Example of Healthy Habit Stacking

An example of habit stacking could be stacking a 10 minute workout onto your morning cup of coffee or tea. To connect these habits, you could plan to work out immediately after finishing your morning drink. Setting a reminder on your phone will help you remember, and laying out your workout clothes out will serve as a visual cue. Lastly, you can track your progress by logging your workouts weekly in your planner.

