



# Seven Tips for Shaping Healthy Habits

For many of us, our daily life is set around habits, structure, and patterns. Think about it: most of us wake up around the same time each day, eat a relatively similar breakfast, and our daily habits continue on from there. Habits can be helpful or hurtful to maintaining or achieving a healthy lifestyle. If you've ever tried to eat better, get at least seven hours of sleep each night, or floss daily, you know that habits are not easy to form or change. That is, unless you know some tricks of the trade. Here are some practical strategies to help you get started.

## 1 Be Aware

To make behaviors habitual, you need to repeat them or practice them frequently. To start a new habit or end a bad habit:

- ▶ Be aware of why you are practicing a certain behavior, and what your thoughts are surrounding it.
- ▶ By understanding why you are practicing a certain behavior, you can begin to alter it.



### EXAMPLE:

You floss every now and then, but you would like to start flossing on a more regular basis. Consider why you don't floss: Do you not have time to floss? Are you too tired to floss before bed? Do you forget to floss?

Then consider what would make you floss more: What time of day would be most convenient for you to floss? Would setting up a daily reminder help?

## 2 Start Small

When we make a goal to "eat healthier" it can be easy to push it off until tomorrow because it seems vague and perhaps a little daunting.

- ▶ Rather than starting big, start small and be specific.
- ▶ Starting with a small, measurable step can help you get started on your healthy habit.
- ▶ Starting small also enables you to build off of the foundation that you have created with your first step.
- ▶ Try to find a healthy activity that will make you say "I can do that," and then try it out.



### EXAMPLE:

Instead of setting a goal to "eat healthier," make a goal to eat a piece of fruit with your breakfast at least four days a week.

## 3 Set Up Reminders

The longer and more often a habit is practiced, the more likely it is to become second nature. But before the habit is second nature, stay on top of your new habits by setting up reminders. Reminders include:

- ▶ Written notes.
- ▶ Physical reminders.
- ▶ Calendar reminders.



### EXAMPLE:

**Written notes:** Put a sticky note on your bathroom mirror to remind you to floss.

**Physical reminders:** Place floss on your sink top.

**Calendar reminders:** Set a reminder on your phone or email calendar to floss at the same time each day.



## 4 Track Your Progress

Track your progress to reinforce the change, keep you accountable, and remind you of how far you've already come. Maintain awareness of your progress and keep yourself motivated when you:

- ▶ Write down the actions you've completed that support your goal.
- ▶ Check off items on an action plan.
- ▶ Use whatever method is easiest and most convenient for you, whether it's on your phone, a piece of paper, or a voice message.



### EXAMPLE:

Start a note on your phone, and record every time you floss. Tally how many times you flossed at the end of each week.

## 5 Fill the Void to Stop a Habit

Replacing a bad habit with a good one is much easier than stopping a bad habit cold turkey. If you're trying to quit a bad habit:

- ▶ Replace the bad habit with something else, preferably a healthy alternative.



### EXAMPLE:

You eat French fries or potato chips with your meals regularly in order to fill up. To make your meal healthier, yet still filling, have a side salad or fruit with your meal instead of fries or chips.

## 6 Start a Friendly Competition

A friendly competition can serve as great motivation to stick to a new healthy behavior that you are trying to make a habit.

- ▶ Challenge your friends or family to a healthy competition to make being healthy fun.
- ▶ A competition provides social support, and helps keep you accountable.
- ▶ Once you have finished one competition, keep it interesting by upping the ante.



### EXAMPLE:

The habit you would like to form is to pack a healthy lunch most days of the week instead of eating out. Challenge your colleagues to see who can pack a healthy lunch the most days in one work week.

## 7 Reward Yourself

Rewarding yourself for what you do accomplish, and not dwelling on what you do not accomplish, keeps your focus positive.

- ▶ Rather than beating yourself up for not perfectly meeting your goals, reward yourself for what you were able to accomplish.
- ▶ Every step, no matter how small, is a step in the right direction.



### EXAMPLE:

You drank water instead of soda most days this week. With the money you saved on not buying soda, reward yourself with a new water bottle.

## **i** WANT TO GET STARTED?

Try the [1-5-7 Wellness of the Day Challenge](#), which is built on these strategies. The challenge starts off small, but by the end, you will be forming healthy habits of things you never thought you had time for!

And remember, practicing a new habit regularly will help ingrain it into your daily patterns. If you skip a day, don't be deterred — you can get right back to it! The longer and more often the habit is practiced, the more likely it is to become second nature.

Need some tips for shaping better eating, sleeping, and flossing habits? Check out these resources for ideas about small steps you can take today to start forming healthy habits:

- ▶ [Improving Your Eating Habits](#)
- ▶ [Sleep Matters: Tips on How to Get More Sleep](#)
- ▶ [Flossing 101](#)