

# HOW TO CHANGE YOUR HABITS



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BITESIZE

Put your mind to work by building healthy, productive routines

## CREATURES OF HABIT

Think about all the things you've done today. How many of them can you actually remember doing? Most of our actions are mindless. We run our lives on loops, doing the same things time and again, and occasionally waking from our routines to try something new. Almost everything you do is handled by your unconscious mind, from routine tasks like walking and talking, to more complex skills.

We barely remember learning most habits, like brushing our teeth, washing our hands or saying thank you. Good habits improve our health, work and relationships; bad habits harm us and those around us. As the philosopher Aristotle put it:

"Excellence is not an action, **but a habit.**"

Your unconscious mind is actually very smart. Anything you do **regularly, intensively and for a long time**, your mind will begin to automate. Soon you can do it without thinking, freeing up your conscious mind to focus on new or difficult tasks. We call these automatic mental loops "habits".

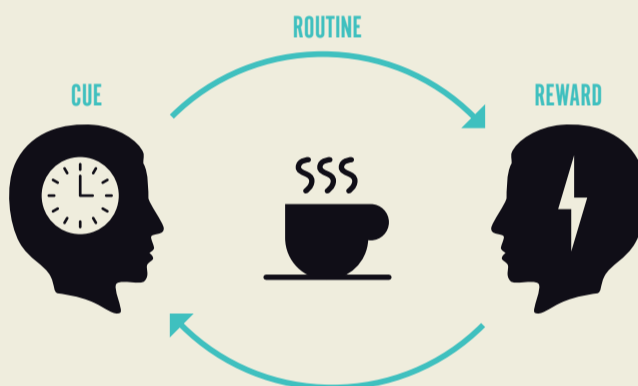
## THE HABIT LOOP



In his book **The Power of Habit**, Charles Duhigg describes the process of habit-forming as a 'habit loop'. The habit loop contains a **cue**, a **routine**, and a **reward**.

Cues are reminders that trigger your mind to start a loop. They could be positive or negative:

- **Visual cues** (adverts, environment, cake)
- **Situations** (a certain place or time of day)
- **Thoughts** (memories, words, mental loops)
- **Feelings** (boredom, tension, sadness, worry)
- **Other people** (peer pressure or persuasion)



Rewards are why your mind first learned this habit, however basic or unwise. They can be:

- **Physical sensations** (energy, taste, pleasure)
- **Emotional payoffs** (happier, safer, calmer)
- **Social success** (pride, praise, status)

The **"golden rule of habit change"** is that if you keep the same cue and the same reward, you can develop a new routine.

Many rewards are short-term, so we often build habits that give us quick hits but longer problems.

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

### MIND TRAINING

Changing your habits takes work, but it can be done:

1. **Spot the cues:** notice when you do it, so you can take action when you notice the loop kicking in.
2. **Identify the rewards:** the physical, emotional or social benefits it offers.
3. **Find a new routine:** a more sustainable way to get a similar reward.

It can take a long time to build the new habit - a few weeks or even months - and it is easier for habits with intense, immediate rewards. You will need **willpower**.

Don't overload your mind.

We overestimate how much willpower we have, and changing our habits is tiring. Change one thing at a time, avoid temptation and be kind to your mind: it's just trying to be helpful.



### WILLPOWER

Willpower is a **controlled process** to overrule your instincts and stick to your intentions. It's tiring though, so changing your habits can be exhausting, and it's harder to do when you feel **tired, fed up or stressed**.

Think about what helps you control yourself, and seek out situations which make it easier to stick to your intentions. Social support can help, linking the new habit to things you enjoy, and focussing on **clear goals** and little victories. Eventually your mind will get the idea.

This free tip sheet was created by Mindapples to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic. To find out more about our apps, e-learning, webinars, face-to-face training and charitable work, visit [www.mindapples.org](http://www.mindapples.org).