

HEALTHY HABITS



MY ACTION PLAN FOR BUILDING HABITS FOR GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Mastering your habits will help you to

- Evict self-harming thoughts
- Convert self-sabotaging habits
- Build habits that strengthen your physical and mental health
- Become good at building habits

Having a repertoire of automatic actions that look after your real interests will make your life easier and happier, and keep you afloat when times get tough

1. *WHAT KIND OF PERSON DO YOU WANT TO BECOME?*

- **What kind of life do you want to live?**
- **what things do you want to do?**
- **what friendships do you want to have?**
- **what things do you want to be able to do?**
- **what do you want to feel like and look like?**
- **what kind of fun do you want to be able to enjoy?**

**Are your habits going to take you there?
Are you the director of your life?**

2. *WHICH OF YOUR HABITS ARE BUILDING A PERSON YOU WOULD NOT WANT TO BECOME?*

Which of your habits are making you less resilient?

Which of your habits make your life harder when you are stressed? Think about:

- things you do
- things you stop doing
- things you think
- things you say to yourself

Which habits need to be edited out of your life

Most of our bad habits are early lessons, or survival behaviour gone wrong. They might be right in some situations, but in our current life they work against us

- self-soothing with cake | chips | crisps | alcohol | pudding | sweets | doughnuts
- entrancing ourselves with shopping | surfing | bingeing | gambling | porn
- being disorganised, procrastinating, prioritising everyone else, denying our own needs, avoiding challenges,
- staying up late
- drinking to relax / soothe / numb
- eating foods high in fat, sugar, starch, salt
- surfing the internet instead of speaking
- slobbering instead of exercising
- hugging the sofa not a human
- putting it off as long as possible
- talking to ourselves in ways that would get us sacked or attacked if we said it out loud to another person

What do you do?

When - what is the cue - external, internal (feeling)?

What do you really need?

- sleep
- safety
- human contact
- achievement
- appreciation
- compassion
- laughter
- tears
- express anger | fear | disappointment

etc, etc, etc

What is the habit actually doing to you - (ie not what you want)

- How can you manage the cue?
- out of sight | out of reach
- spend less time with friends who always get drunk
- or meet them somewhere that doesn't involve alcohol
- buy smaller packs of biscuits, or leave them in the shop
- when your partner snacks on the sofa, ask them to put the stuff out of your reach

What other behaviour could you carry out when you encounter the cue?

- drink fancy water
- eat apples | carrots | tomatoes | oranges
- get up and stretch
- seduce your partner
- get up and go to bed

Books:

- The Gratitude Project - How the Science of Thankfulness Can Rewire Our Brains for

3. *DEVELOP NEW HABITS THAT WILL SERVE AND PROTECT YOU*

Select a new behaviour

What's in it for you - what is the long-term reward and how does it help you become someone you want to be?

Think through the behaviour in detail - what will you do, how often, where will you need to be, what gear will you need, what skills will you need to develop, is there a friend or an app who can help, what time of day probably works best.

What existing cues match up with your new behaviour?

- when I put the toothbrush in my mouth
- as I wait for the computer to wake up
- as I wait for the coffee machine to make a cup
- as I wait for the kettle to boil
- after I go to the loo
- after I wash my hands
- whenever I sit down
- when I'm holding my first cup of coffee
- when I get into the car
- when I put the lead on the dog
- when I get onto the train

Does the new behaviour fit in at the beginning or end, or can it fit alongside (do a lunge while you clean your teeth, do a twist while the computer wakes up)

What is the smallest behaviour that I will commit to?

- poke my face out of the door
- put my gym shoes on
- look up the phone number
- sit up like the Queen
- touch my toes
- do one press-up
- pick up an orange
- name today's frog
- put one thing away
- dad-dance for 10 seconds

What is my dopamine hit? How do I give myself an immediate and certain reward that my habit centre will buy?

- a suitable app
- star chart on the fridge
- habit tracker chart
- post it on Facebook
- high five yourself
- smile in the mirror
- 2 minutes in child pose
- 2 minutes on social media
- have a coffee or tea
- put £1 in your big-treat savings jar

4. *PREPARE FOR FAILURE*

What will make you fail?

- too big a change - your threat centre is scared of obvious change, so start small and gently ramp it up
- too many changes - start with just one bad habit and maybe one new habit
- too tired - but will it energise you?
- not enough time - not even 1 minute?
- it's too much - so make it smaller
- forgot - can you tack a reminder onto the cue?
- can't find the gear - leave it somewhere obvious
- it's raining - isn't it great getting dry and warm when you come home
- I'm injured/ill - fair enough, but what are you doing to care for yourself?
- I don't want to - is that a bad habit trying to undermine you, trying to stop you becoming someone you'd love to be

I am a person who gets back up and gets going again

I am a person who wants a different future

I am a person who wants to be healthy

I am a person who values their own health

I am a person who values their own self

I am a person who likes myself

5. *MULTIPLIER HABITS*

After a few weeks, as your new habit settles in and your bad habit gets converted, you might feel ready add another habit or two. And, once that is getting settled/converted, you might take on another. If you're using a habit tracker chart, you'll be able to remove a habit when you've been doing it for a few months, because your habit centre will have made it part of your new normal.

Some habits deliver a lot more than they demand

- A mindful moment puts your thought centre back in charge - it re-boots your day
- Exercise gives you a sense of achievement, reduces inflammation, builds resistance to illness, helps you believe you can overcome challenges, and it gives you a chance to think
- Naming your frog and eating it first thing gives you another achievement, cuts out the self-harm of procrastination; and focuses you on doing what matters to you
- Starting tomorrow today lets you identify what really matters to you, and lets you close down today so that you can sleep with a clear conscience
- Sleep is your health miracle. Your body needs it. Your brain needs it so much that if it doesn't get enough it just takes it when it can. Insufficient sleep makes your brain slow. Insufficient sleep triggers inflammation and inflammation makes you feel ill, tired, withdrawn, miserable, helpless.
- Micro-exercise (up and about every 30 minutes) keeps your brain and metabolism alert and gets you out of a tired, defeated posture. While you're at it, take a mindful moment.

Have fun making your new future!

Further reading

Stephen Covey: The 7 habits of highly effective people

David Allen: Getting things done

James Clear: Atomic habits

BJ Fogg: Tiny habits

Charles Duhigg: The power of habit

Jake Knapp and John Zeratsky: Make time

Richard H Thaler & Cass R Sunstein: Nudge

Lisa Feldman Barrett: 7 and a half lessons about the brain

RESILIENT HABIT SUGGESTIONS

- Get up within 10 minutes of the alarm
- Spend those minutes recalling your dreams, gathering your thoughts, cuddling if you can
- Do a few simple exercises or stretches as you clean your teeth
- Have a cold shower, or at least a cold-blast at the end of your shower
- Wash mindfully
- Look yourself in the eye and make your commitment for the day
- I am the kind of person who
- Be mindful as you drink your coffee / tea / hot water with lemon
- Visualise your future you, your future life
- Am I OK? (check yourself against the signs of stress)
- Eat your frog
- Eat the biggest frog first
- Pick some low-hanging fruit
- Exercise
- Deal with the 1-3 must-do tasks that deliver value for you
- Do one thought-task at a time
- Time chunk – anything from 20 to 40 minutes
- Move between time chunks– simple exercises or stretches, or step outside to say hello to nature
- When you move, smile
- Slow breathe between time chunks
- When you sit down, engage your PC muscle
- When you sit down, lower your shoulders
- Get 2 or more of your 5-a-day at breakfast
- Build each meal or snack from the fruit and veg
- Eat away from screens and desk
- Show more than you tell
- Ask more than you tell
- Just ask
- Talk about people more than task
- Pay attention to the people you love – really pay attention – look and listen
- Hug the people you love
- Start early, giving it time to brew. You have time to think, others have time to contribute
- Just do a tiny bit
- Everything has its place: Only one place at home. Only one place when mobile
- Pause as you leave your home, pause when you return home – change state
- Empty your handbag each day
- Scan your receipts, then bin them
- Review your day, your week, your month, your year
- Get your worries onto paper – which you are welcome to destroy
- Get your thoughts onto paper – which you are welcome to destroy
- Know how you spend your time
- Know what you get out of your time
- Keep in touch
- Smile at strangers
- Compliment strangers
- Dance like nobody's watching
- Sing like nobody can hear