How to Form Healthy Habits in 21 Days

Every January begins with good intentions. The hope of a fresh start along with a new sense of determination inspires a variety of goals and resolutions, which unfortunately are often abandoned by the time spring rolls around.

Changing our habits can be difficult. Dr. Maxwell Maltz’s book, *Psycho-Cybernetics*, instigated the idea that habits are formed in about 21 days. But life is unpredictable and when things come up that knock us off our routine, it can be hard to get back on track. If you find yourself trying to start or restart good habits, here are a few tips to help you get going and keep it up when things get difficult.

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**Remove Roadblocks**

When you’re regularly late to your 9 a.m. yoga class, take a look at what you’re doing before you leave the house to determine what’s eating away at your time. You might need to pack your gym bag before you go to bed or have the kids get their lunches ready the night before. Anticipate distractions that have impeded success in the past so you can make plans to avoid them in the future.

**Take It Slow**

Developing a new habit takes effort as well as time. If you try to make a change that is too drastic, the chances are you’ll end up frustrated and burned out, which makes quitting very tempting. If you want to develop better eating habits but spending time in the kitchen isn’t your thing, plunging into a gourmet cookbook might be a little overwhelming. Instead of setting yourself up to fail, make a simpler change like choosing healthier options at restaurants or picking one or two simple recipes to try out.

**Pick the Right Habit**

Being clear about what you want to achieve improves your chances for success. If you want to be less tired, make a habit of getting to sleep earlier in lieu of drinking energy-boosting beverages. If you want to lose weight, work on eating more fruits and vegetables rather than only doing aerobics. If you want to start exercising more, set aside 30 minutes three times a week, instead of hitting the gym for two hours on your first day.

**Be Consistent**

Since habits form by repeating actions, it’s important not to deviate from your routine. If you’re going to start using vitamins, be sure to take them at the same time every day. If breakfast is when you take them but tomorrow you’ll be on the go, take a packet with you so you won’t have to skip a day.

**Allow for Setbacks**

Things will come up that interrupt your normal schedule. When you do miss a step in your routine, don’t throw in the towel. Look at what factors contributed to the lapse and avoid them if you can in the future. Otherwise know that temporary setbacks are normal, remind yourself of the number of times you’ve succeeded, and start again tomorrow.

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**Keep at It!**

Once you have the right habit in mind and you’ve done your best to remove barriers to your success, the most important thing is to repeat the action for three to four weeks or until the behavior becomes second nature.