



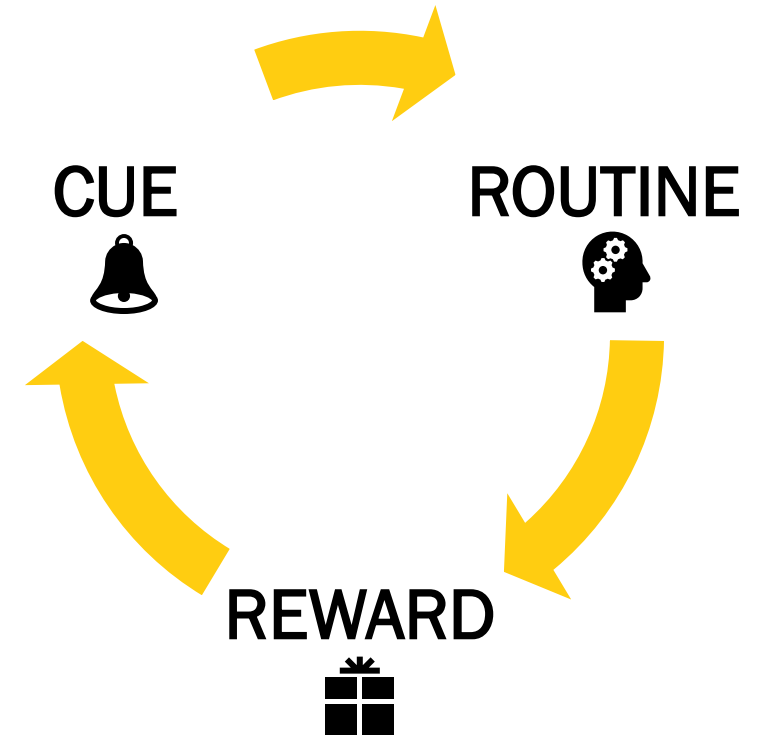
# Building Healthy Habits

# What Are Habits?

- Habits are patterns of behaviors that govern our everyday life. Many habits impact our health, like eating patterns, physical activity and taking medicines.
- About 40% of our daily “decisions” aren’t active decisions at all—they are habits.
- The more routine and repeated a behavior becomes, the less mental energy goes into it.
  - In other words, we are on “auto pilot.”
  - Our brains don’t automatically identify “good” vs. “bad” habits.
- Habits are fragile and fall apart quickly when we make even small changes.
  - That means we can change habits to more build more desirable behaviors.
  - We have to understand our habit and exert mindful control.

# The “Habit Loop”

- Habit formation and endurance involves three main components:
  1. **A cue** – The automatic trigger for a behavior to start. Something that makes the behavior seemingly automatic.
  2. **A routine** – The repeated thought or behavior.
  3. **A reward** – Something reinforces the habit and helps the brain remember the behavior.
- Every habit has a cue and a reward. While we often focus on changing behavior (the habit), the key is to change the cue and the reward.



# Cues

Cues are essential in habit formation. All habitual behaviors are triggered by one or more condition:

- **A location** (e.g., you walk into work, see someone brought cookies, so you eat one)
- **A time of the day** (e.g., you take a daily coffee break at 10am)
- **An emotional reaction** (e.g., you're at home bored, so you log into Facebook)
- **Someone else's behavior** (e.g., your friend orders a cocktail at dinner, so you follow suit)
- **Another behavior that precedes the habit** (e.g., your phone buzzes, so you pick it up to check your text messages)

# Rewards

- Rewards can be just about anything that:
  1. Brings us pleasure or some desired outcome.
  2. Helps us avoid an unpleasant or undesired outcome.
- Often rewards are difficult to clarify—they can be layered, meaning a habit may be rewarded by multiple things.
- When it comes to behavior change, it is important to define all the rewards but hone in on the primary reward that drives us to repeat the habit.

# Changing Habits

*Altering the current, adding the new, and eliminating the old*

First we have to be mindful of our habits and take ourselves off “auto pilot.” This allows us to be more aware of the habits we want to change.



# Diagnosing Your Habit

1. **What are the cues?** Identify the time of day, location, circumstances of others' behaviors, etc. that either trigger or accompany your habit.
2. **What are your rewards?** What is the upside of your habit? What are you getting out of it that may lead to you doing the habit again?
3. **What is the downside?** Identify all the reasons to stop or change the habit. What can you gain if you change?

# Changing Our Health Habits

After diagnosing your habit, here are some steps to begin to making some changes:

1. **Check your readiness and prepare for behavior change:** Are you still thinking about a change? Or are you ready to take action?
2. **Make a plan:** What **cues** and **rewards** are you going to change? Even small changes can have a ripple effect. Test out different behaviors. Examine your response to each.
3. **Build willpower:** What obstacles do you face? How can you overcome them? Don't forget the reward!
4. **Add accountability checks to sustain the change:** Take time to notice and measure your change. Tell someone about your efforts to change.



# Changing Our Health Habits

## Example: After-work snacking

1. **Take a habit inventory:** *I want to stop snacking on junk food when I get home from work.*
2. **Check your readiness and prepare for behavior change:** *Snacking adds unnecessary calories from unhealthy foods. I know there are better ways to manage stress. It also ruins my appetite for dinner. I'm ready to take action.*
3. **Identify a habit you want to change—diagnose that habit; cues:** *I'm hungry after work and want to unwind. There is also junk food readily available. These are controllable cues.*
4. **Make a plan:** *I will eliminate unhealthy snacking and minimize healthy snacks. I will have a healthy snack later in the day before leaving work. I will stop buying junk food. I will stay out of the kitchen and find other ways to unwind, like taking a shower or going for a walk.*
5. **Build willpower by addressing obstacles and creating new rewards:** *My spouse buys snacks for the kids and cooks dinner late. We can avoid buying unhealthy snacks and schedule dinner earlier. I will enjoy dinner more and be less fatigued from overeating in the evening.*
6. **Add accountability checks to sustain the change:** *I will discuss this with my family and get them on board. I will engage them in problem-solving. I will start tracking my weight and pay attention to how I feel in the evenings.*

# Changing our Health Habits

## Example: Increasing physical activity

1. **Take a habit inventory:** *I want to start exercising. I am currently too sedentary.*
2. **Check your readiness and prepare for behavior change:** *I hate exercising, but I recognize the importance on my health and that I will feel better if I do. I will find activities I enjoy, like bike riding or taking walks with my spouse.*
3. **Identify a habit you want to change—diagnose that habit:** *I can predict my schedule more in the morning better than after work. So I will get up 30 minutes earlier and use my morning routine as a cue to exercise.*
4. **Make a plan:** *My spouse has agreed to participate with me. So we will get up together and go for a 30-minute walk each morning.*
5. **Build willpower by addressing obstacles and creating new rewards:** *I'm tired in the morning. So I will move my alarm so I don't hit snooze. I will set out my exercise clothes the night before and build in time for coffee before I walk. I will pay attention to my weight and energy levels so I can track the benefits of exercising.*
6. **Add accountability checks to sustain the change:** *Getting my spouse to participate will help keep me on track. I will also buy a tracking device to help me see how much exercise I'm getting. I will also track my weight so I can see the results.*

# Recommended Reading

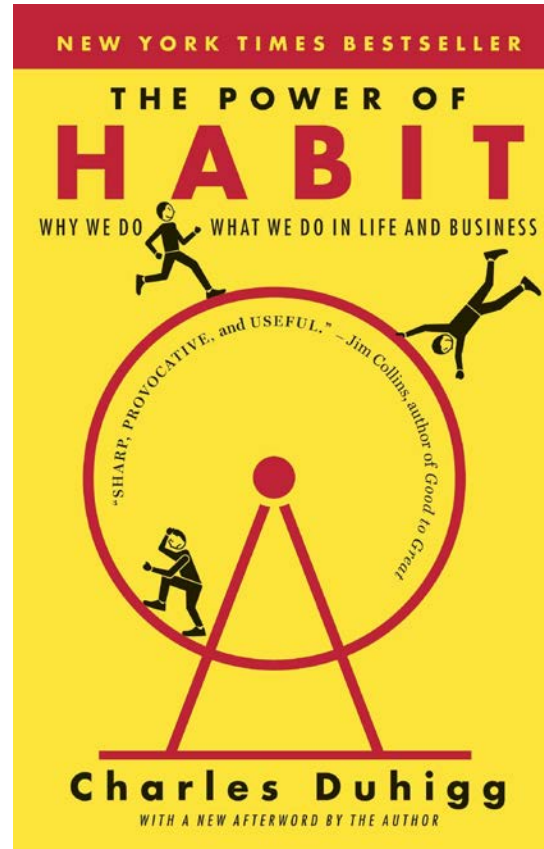


Image Source: Amazon ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))

# Total health



Emotional



Financial



Physical



Purpose



Social