

Building a habit that sticks

Easy · 10 min to set up · Free

Pick one small, specific action, tie it to something you already do every day, and repeat it. In a study of 96 people, it took 66 days on average to feel automatic (anywhere from 18 to an estimated 254), the biggest gains came early, and missing one day didn't undo progress. Track it, make it easy, and plan for the days that go wrong.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ One small habit you want
- ☐ A calendar or notes app to track it
- ☐ A daily cue you already have (coffee, brushing teeth, getting in the car)

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Pick one thing, small and specific.** NIH suggests a plan with small, reasonable goals and specific actions. "Get healthy" is a wish. "Walk 10 minutes after dinner" is a habit.
- 2 **Tie it to a cue you already have.** In the habit study, every new behavior was linked to a daily cue: a 15-minute run before dinner, a piece of fruit with lunch, 50 sit-ups after morning coffee. Write it as "After I ____, I will ____."
- 3 **Make it easy.** Make the healthy choice the easy choice, and change things around you to support it: stock what you need, remove temptations, find a spot. Lay out your shoes the night before.
- 4 **Track it.** Use a paper journal, an app or a calendar. Keeping a record helps you stay focused and catch slip-ups.
- 5 **Plan for obstacles.** Think about what could derail you, like stress, travel or a late shift, and decide how you'll still do a version of it.
- 6 **Get people involved.** Health habits tend to mirror those of family and friends, so invite someone to join or check in with you.
- 7 **Expect it to take weeks.** On average, people reached peak automaticity at 66 days, and early repetitions produced the biggest gains. Reward small milestones with something healthy.

Watch out Don't start five habits at once. More complex behaviors take longer: people who chose an exercise habit took about one and a half times as long to reach their plateau as people who chose an eating or drinking habit. Even after 84 days, about half the participants hadn't reached a level that counted as a habit.

DAD NOTE *Small and every day beats big and someday.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/mind/habits-that-stick/building-a-habit-that-sticks/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: NIH News in Health; British Psychological Society.