



WHAT'S COMING UP?

- Why habits are hard to break
- The Habit Loop
- How to Change a Habit
- Are you ready to make a change? See what "stage" you are in.
- Determine your motivator
- Recipe

In order to succeed, we must first believe we can!



# Wellness Corner Connection

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## Don't Make Resolutions, Create HEALTHY Habits!

**Habits: Why Are Some So Hard To Break?** Resource: Johns Hopkins Health Review

The great English writer Samuel Johnson once said, "The chains of habit are too weak to be felt, until they are too strong to be broken."

We have all, at some point, have tried to break a bad habit just by telling ourselves "I won't do that anymore", "I am going to quit today" or "After the New Year I'm going to ..." and yet even with that mindset, our efforts often fail us.

### Why are habits so hard to break?

Habits enable us to complete tasks quickly and efficiently without using a lot of "brain power". They are automatic and occur without thought. In some instances, they can actually be quite handy. Imagine the daily task of brushing your teeth. You do not have to think about the steps: I'm going to pick up my tooth brush, I'm going to put toothpaste on the brush, I'm going to brush up and down...you get the picture. All you have to say is think "I'm going to brush my teeth" and your brain automatically guides you through the steps without any further thought.

We rely on habits to successfully get us through the day. As Charles Duhigg writes in *The Power of Habit*, "without habits, our brains would shut down, overwhelmed by the [details] of everyday life."

### So what is a habit?

It's something you do automatically when in a particular situation, or in response to a particular image, sound, or smell. It has been learned through repeatedly performing an action. Just performing the behavior doesn't make it a habit. However, if you behave a certain way in response to a particular situation and that becomes your default behavior, then it is a habit.

Think of it this way: **Neurons** that fire together, wire together. So if the neurons that respond to a particular cue or trigger fire the same time as neurons that cause a particular behavior, the connection between these neurons will become stronger thus forming a habit. If you receive a reward for performing a said behavior (relaxed feeling, good tasting food, praise) the bond is strengthened even more.

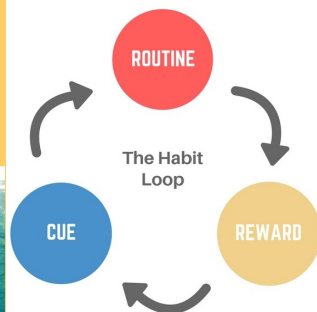
How quickly someone learns a habit depends on how strong the reward is and the regularity with which the action is performed. For instance, a habit will grow stronger and faster if it's done exactly the same way every morning.

### 80% of New Year resolutions fail by February because:

1. Your goals aren't clear.
2. You feel overwhelmed.
3. You feel discouraged.
4. You're not ready to change.

A **neuron** is a cell that can transmit electrical and chemical signals. Neurons are considered to be the *building blocks of the nervous system* and make up the major nerve pathways that are responsible for communicating information throughout the body.

**The Habit Loop: How Habits Form** Resource: Examined Existence



For a habit to start and continue, there are *three essential parts*: the cue (or trigger), the routine (or behavior), and the reward.

**The cue** – this is the trigger that tells your brain to go into cruise control or automatic mode allowing a specific behavior to occur. The cue can be a person, place, thing or feeling.

Usually there is a clear trigger that starts the pattern. Sometimes the triggers are emotional — the wanting a drink or cigarette or nail biting driven by stress. Other times the trigger is more simply situational and environmental: You see the TV and couch as soon as you hit the front door, and now your brain connects the dots, and eating dinner in front of the TV on the couch is not far behind. More often, it is a combination of both — the mix of social anxiety and the party environment leads to your heavier drinking.

**The routine (behavior)** – an action that can be mental, emotional or physical. This is what makes a habit, a habit!

**The reward** – this is what makes the habit worthwhile according to your brain. Sometimes they may not seem like "rewards" when they cause you financial, physical, or emotional pain. Yet when you perform the particular behavior, you get a shot of endorphins (a "feel-good" chemical) that builds a "connection" in your brain which says *routine = reward*. Runners get "runner's high" or the release of endorphins after a run, that's the reward. Smokers get the same chemical reaction in the brain when they smoke. Even checking your email can give you that shot of endorphins even though you might not see it as a reward.

"We first make our habits, and then our habits make us."



## How To Change a Habit

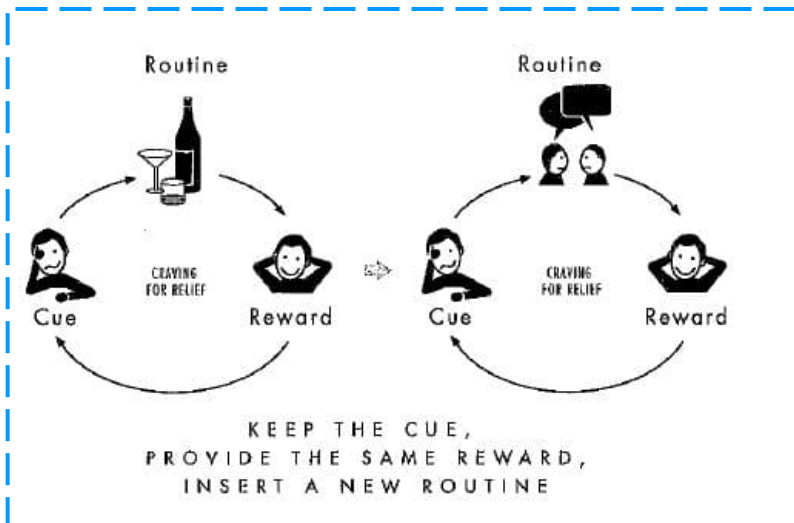
- \* **Develop new habits**
- \* **Set up reminders**
- \* **Hide the things you don't want to trigger old habits**
- \* **Be aware**
- \* **Eliminate distractions**

Although breaking habits is never easy, the "rule" in doing so is simple...**replace the routine (or automatic behavior) with a new routine.** Easier said than done, right? Perhaps, but it definitely works if you are ready to give it time! That's the hardest part. Your brain wants to go back to what was easy, comfortable, automatic. To change that you must **consciously** replace it with something new.

Keep the cue and the reward the same, but replace the routine. For example you want to quit smoking, instead of smoking (the routine) when you have a craving brought on by stress (the cue), you can go for a walk with someone and talk through it. And similarly, if you want to start a new habit, all you have to do is create or identify a cue that will initiate a routine. For example, bring your sneakers to work. When you see them, it triggers taking a walk at lunch.

In the picture to the left below, we see the cue is stress, which leads to the routine of alcohol use, leading to a reward of relaxation and feeling better. In the picture to the right, we keep the cue and the reward the same, but we just change the routine, and thereby breaking the habit of resorting to alcohol to solve problems. It's not going to happen right away.

Sometimes it's difficult to identify the triggers. If this is true for you, work backwards. When you crave the drink or cigarette, slow down and use your **awareness** of the behavior as a signal to ask yourself: "what emotionally is going on right now to cause this routine?"



Breaking habits isn't  
about  
STOPPING  
but  
SUBSTITUTING.

### Steps to get you started:

- ⇒ Define the concrete behavior you want to change or develop (stop eating so much junk food after dinner)
- ⇒ Identify the triggers (bored, stressed, lonely, watching TV)
- ⇒ Deal with the triggers (remove all junk food from your house)
- ⇒ Develop a substitute plan (read a book, go for a walk after dinner)
- ⇒ Change the larger pattern (don't grocery shop when hungry or stressed which may lead you to buy the junk food in the first place)
- ⇒ Use prompts (reminders to help you break the habit i.e. putting your shoes by the TV to remind you to walk not sit on the couch)
- ⇒ Get support (call a friend, ask your spouse to walk with you, walk the dog)
- ⇒ Support and reward yourself (save the money you would have spent on junk food to buy yourself something you have always wanted)
- ⇒ Be persistent and patient – don't beat yourself up for slip-ups. One day at a time!
- ⇒ Consider getting professional help



## Make This Year Different!

This year, make a promise to yourself, not just to lose those extra pounds that seem to be creeping on, not just to exercise more or get more sleep, but to really **change the way you face life**. Change the way you think about yourself, your job, your health, your purpose! This is a time for a new beginning. And take every minute of it to keep moving forward. What is it you want from your life? What is holding you back? I hope as we go forward in this new year, I can help, even if in a small way, by providing you with information, resources, “food for thought” that will remind you to keep moving forward towards your goal of changing old habits! Stay focused on all you do right and remember only you can choose to make your life your own! You can do it if you believe you can!



Believe  
you can  
— & —  
you're halfway  
there.

T. ROOSEVELT

### Are You READY to Make A Change?

I have written about this before but thought it was a perfect time to revisit since we're talking about changing habits. To be successful with any change, one needs to be in the right “stage” of change. There are six stages we all go through as we attempt to “break” a bad habit or just make healthier life choices. It's important that we understand where we are to seek the support we need to follow through. Where are you?

#### Precontemplation Stage (Not ready)

Individuals in this stage are not even thinking about making a change in the foreseeable future, usually measured as the next six months. Being uninformed or under informed may be a reason one stays in this stage. It may also be due to multiple unsuccessful attempts that has led to demoralization about the ability to change. Reasons for this obliviousness to change can be categorized as “the Four R's”:

**Reluctant** precontemplators are those who through lack of knowledge or disinterest do not want to consider change. They have not come to terms with the impact of the problem.

**Rebellious** precontemplators have a heavy investment in the “habit” and in making their own decisions. They are resistant to being told what to do or advised on making changes for their own health.

**Resigned** precontemplators have given up hope about the possibility of change and seem overwhelmed by the problem. Many have made many attempts without success.

**Rationalizing** precontemplators have all the answers; they have plenty of reasons why their habit is not a problem or why it is a problem for others but not them.



#### Contemplation Stage (Getting ready)

Those in this stage are willing to consider the possibility that they may have a problem or making a change would be in their best interest. They also have hope that change can take place. However, they are still on the fence and have not yet made a commitment to take necessary steps required to change. Those in this stage are usually interested in learning more; they realize their current habit is creating problems, and they often have a mental list of all the reasons why changing would be beneficial.

Often, with the help of another, they can learn to consider the pros and cons of their behavior and why change may be the right thing to do at this time.



#### Preparation Stage (Ready)

Here, people intend to take action in the immediate future, usually within the next month. All the weighing of pros and cons, all the thought given to why this is a good thing to do finally tips the balance in favor of change. The determination to change finally presents itself. The individual is ready to make a commitment to take action. These individuals of a plan of action, such as joining a gym, consulting a counselor, talking to their physician, seeing a nutritionist or relying on a self-change approach.



#### Action Stage (Implementing the Plan)



In this stage, individuals have put their plan into action within the last six months. This typically involves making some public commitment to change which also lends itself to obtaining the support needed and creates external monitors to stay on track. Not breeds success but success! Seeing progress and gaining confidence will help to make this change a permanent one.



#### Maintenance Stage (Relapse and Recycling)

The Action stage usually takes anywhere from three to six months to complete. Change requires building new patterns over time. The real test of change is long-term sustainability. During the maintenance stage, the old patterns become less likely to reoccur and the desire to return to them less intense. Confidence increases that they can continue the journey they started.

# What's Your Motivator?

### 'One Good Thought' to Change your Harmful Habit

Reminding yourself of core values such as family, health, helping others can activate your sense of purpose and boost your motivation to change.

Many times I hear people saying "I'd really like to change but I just don't have the motivation". Although my typical response would be that motivation will follow once some progress is seen, what is really needed is a "motivator". This does not mean you have to have someone by your side 24/7 edging you on...the "motivator" is something **you** choose. Examples could be:

- Pain motivators, like fear of dying or getting a disease
- Meaningful motivators that bring a stronger sense of purpose to your life, like being a good role model for your children, vitality, or healthy relationships
- Even "not-so-noble" motivators like vanity could work quite well

As long as your motivator doesn't hurt you or others, works to get you going, and is in the service of a worthwhile change, it's probably a fine motivator. You just need to find something of vital importance to you--a passion. Making this choice is a critical first step towards change.

Resource: [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com)

## Easy Crockpot Chicken Fajitas

Slow-cookers make busy lives easier and these fajitas come out juicy and full of flavor!

Recipe  
Corner

<b>YIELDS:</b> <b>6</b> SERVINGS	<b>PREP TIME:</b> <b>0</b> HOURS <b>5</b> MINS	<b>TOTAL TIME:</b> <b>6</b> HOURS <b>5</b> MINS
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### INGREDIENTS

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 3 bell peppers, thinly sliced
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 1 (14-oz.) can diced tomatoes
- 2 tsp.cumin

### DIRECTIONS

Place chicken, bell peppers, and onions in slow-cooker then pour over diced tomatoes. Season with cumin, red pepper flakes, salt, and pepper. Cook on low for 6 hours, or until chicken is cooked through.

Remove chicken from slow-cooker and slice into strips. Serve fajitas in tortillas with desired toppings.



### SERVING IDEAS

- \* Tortillas or Tacos
- \* Guacamole (or plain avocado)
- \* Salsa
- \* Sour cream (or plain yogurt)
- \* Shredded cheddar
- \* Lettuce

Recipe taken from: <https://www.delish.com/cooking/recipe-ideas/a22175263/crockpot-chicken-fajitas-recipe/>

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*Think in terms of the day's resolution, not the year's! Every day is an opportunity to succeed.  
 Take one at a time and just keep going!*

