

Habit Formation

Empowering Participants to Build Sustainable Habits for Lifestyle Change



Emory Centers
for Training and
Technical Assistance

Facilitator



Sarah Piper, MPH, CDCES

National Master Trainer

Lifestyle Coach

Diabetes Training & Technical Assistance Center (DTTAC)

Emory Centers for Public Health Training & Technical Assistance

Rollins School of Public Health | Emory University | Atlanta, GA

Expectations and Disclaimers

- This is introductory content on habit formation theory. *Not an exhaustive presentation on habit formation practice or research*
 - Primary focus on *forming new habits* and less today on eliminating habits
- We are not addressing other factors that influence behavior change such as readiness, efficacy, environmental factors such as social determinants of health
- Research on habit formation and behavior change is evolving

Lifestyle Change:
As easy as brushing your teeth...



Why Focus on Habits?

Understanding the limits of motivation and self-control

Imagine a participant who has set an action plan to engage in regular physical activity throughout the week. This participant comes to group discouraged at repeated “failures” to meet his/her action plan.

“I need more self-control.”

“I just can’t stay motivated.”

“I wish I had more willpower.”

“I feel like a failure. Why can’t I stick with my goals?”

“I was walking regularly/doing good with my food choices until work got stressful, then I got off track.”

Societal Approach to Behavior Change

- *Just do it*
- Get motivated
- Use self-control
- Make good choices
- You have to want it
- Focus on your “why”

The Limits of Self Control and Willpower

- Self-control & will power work better in certain situations that require decisiveness
- Self-control & will power do NOT work as well for repeated actions such as
 - Spending
 - Sleeping
 - Physical activity
 - Eating

Source: Good Habits, Bad Habits, Wendy Wood



Poll

How much of our daily behaviors are ruled by habit?

85%

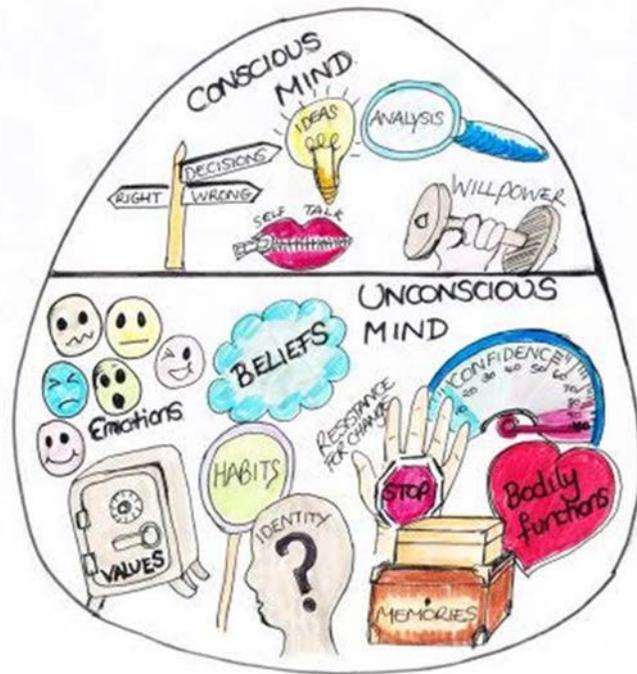
15%

43%

2%

Poll question used with permission by Michael Cannon from his presentation on the same topic

Understanding Habits



- Almost half of our actions aren't conscious choices, we do them by habit
 - Brushing teeth
 - Driving to work
 - How we eat
 - Biting nails

The Problem & Possible Solution

- Changing behaviors is complex and challenging
- Willpower & self-control are a part of the change process, but not enough for sustainable change over time
- Emerging neuro and behavioral science on **habit formation** are shedding light on the role of habits in changing and sustaining behavior

"Because we think self-control and will power is the problem, our cultural solutions focus on choices and self-control"
- Wendy Wood, author and researcher

Habit Over Self Control

- Habits aren't affected by stress, distraction, tiredness or time pressure like our more conscious selves
- Habits make lifestyle changes easier



**CAN'T SOMEONE ELSE
JUST DO IT?**

Poll

- A participant is struggling to establish a regular physical activity routine. Of the options below, what is the reason that best explains the struggle.
 - A. They are not ready to change
 - B. They have low willpower that undermines their attempts to fulfill their action plan
 - C. They have not established a new routine to support physical activity
 - D. They are not convinced that adding physical activity will help them
 - E. None of the above

How Habits Are Formed

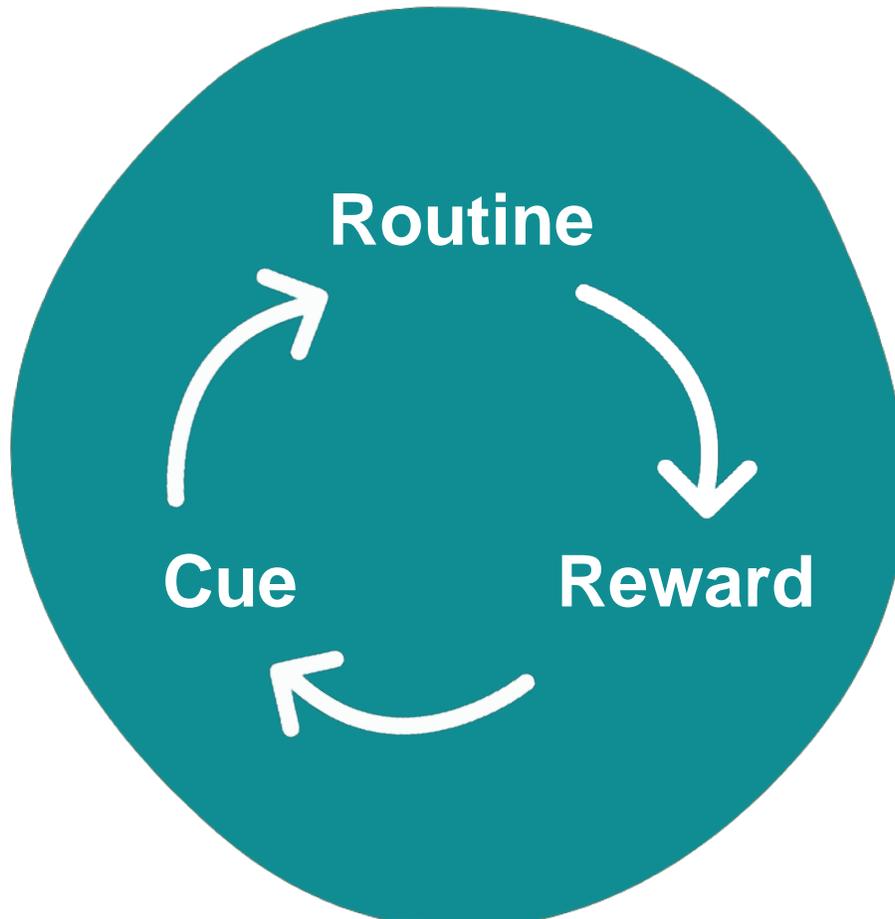
Habit

- **Habit:** a routine of behavior that is repeated regularly and tends to occur subconsciously
- **Habit formation:** the process by which behaviors become automatic
- Habits can form without a person intending to acquire them
- Habits can be deliberately cultivated—or eliminated—to better suit one's personal goals



Source: Psychology Today

What is a Habit Loop?



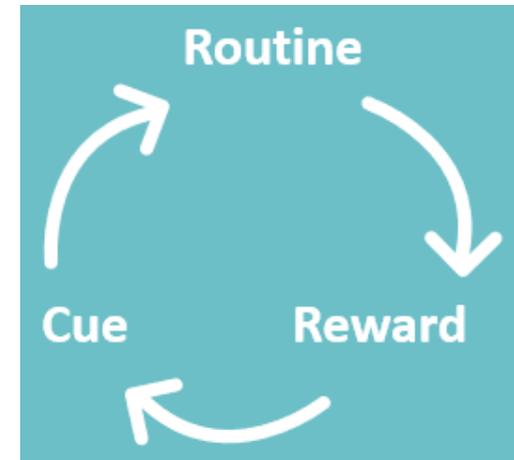
The Cue: What triggers or kick-starts your habitual behavior.

The Routine: The habitual behavior

The Reward: What the behavior does for you

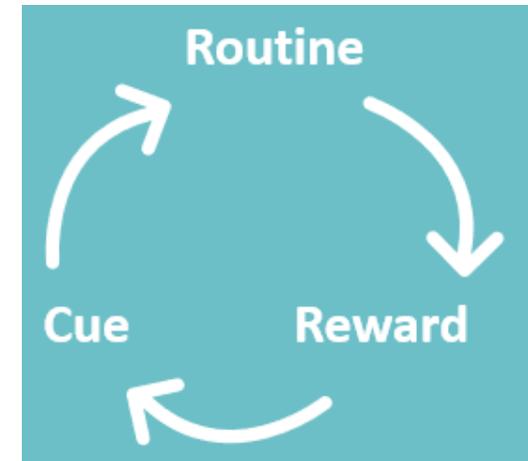
The Routine

- This is the “habit” part of the loop
- Routines in a desired habit loop
 - Brushing teeth
 - Taking the dog for a walk
 - Drinking water
- Routines in an undesired habit loop could be:
 - Eating junk food when stressed
 - Scrolling through phone vs. _____
 - Biting nails while watching TV



The Cue

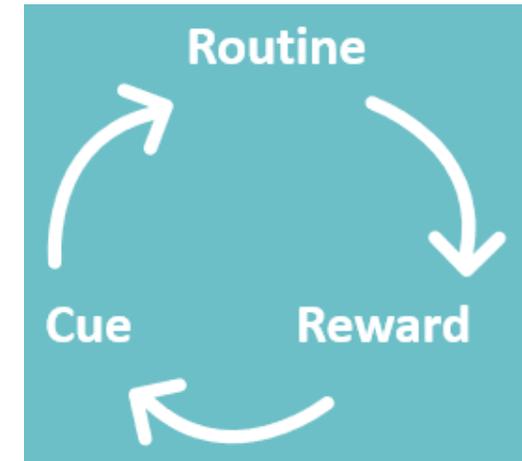
- A cue kicks off a habit behavior
- Most habitual cues fit into one of five categories:
 - Location
 - Time
 - Emotional state
 - Other people
 - Immediately preceding action



The Reward

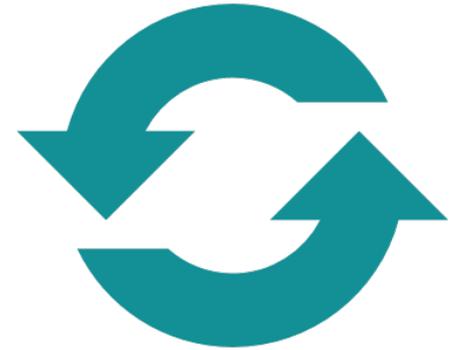
The reward is the bit that makes your brain go “this is great, I’m going to do this as much as I possibly can.”

- Clean teeth
- Taste of the food
- Taste/feeling from caffeine
- Energy from physical activity
- Socializing with friend when walking



Repetition

- With repetition, the habit starts to form
- One's intentions and goals related to that behavior gradually become less influential



Other Keys to Habit Formation

- Select a *new routine* that you like and that's easy to follow
- *Modify the environment* to make it easy to engage in new routine
- If replacing an old routine, *make the old routine harder to follow*
- *Repetition* is key
- Track what happens



Building a New Routine

"I want to spend more time writing. I waste time looking at social media and online shopping and do not make time to write."

Select a *new routine* that you like and that's easy to follow >>>

Modify the environment to make it easy to engage in new routine >>>

If replacing an old routine, *make the old routine harder to follow* >>>

Repetition is key >>>

Track what happens >>>

Take time to write 3X/week

Put my journal and computer on coffee table where I sit when I wake up. Do this on Tues, Thurs & Sat.

Move cell phone to purse immediately to remove temptation

Repeat at least 3x/week (most likely Tues, and Thurs when I *do not* drop off kid, and Sat. Morning)

Put check mark on our refrigerator calendar each time I write

Reward: Intrinsic, feeling more grounded and in touch with self, moving forward on projects, sharing writing with others

Mask Wearing as a Habit

- Self control, willpower & choice helpful in *planning* the cue/context
- Modify the environment
 - Make it easy
 - Make undesirable routine harder



Poll

How long does it take to form a new habit?

21 days

66 days

It takes as long as it takes

Not sure

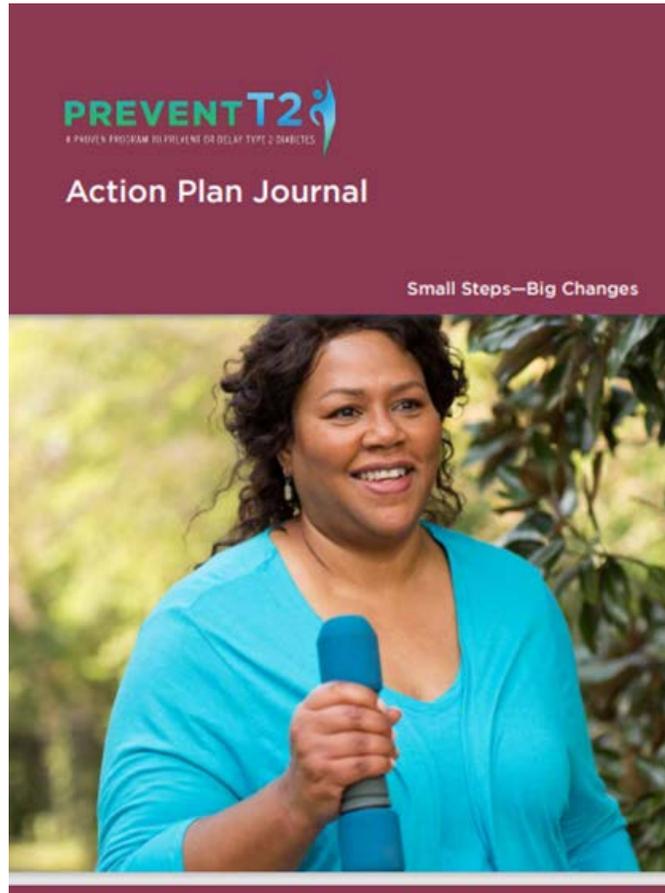
How Long Does it Take to Form a New Habit?



- The amount of time needed to build a habit will depend on multiple factors, including the individual and the intended behavior.
- While you might be able to pick up a new habit in a matter of weeks, some research indicates that building healthy habits can also take many months.

Prevent T2 Action Plan Refresh

Prevent T2 Refreshed Action Plan



- Shift from a weekly goal focus to a *weekly routine* focus -routines that can turn into habits over time
- More emphasis on a small steps to big changes approach and messaging
 - Simple actions become habits more quickly
- The action plan is about planning a *new routine*

Refreshed Action Plan

Action Plan

Use this log to track your progress as you change your routine. Depending on the routine, you may practice several times a day, or a few times a week. Each time you try it, note how it went. If it's not working and you need to change something, write it down too. You don't need to share this log with your Lifestyle Coach. It's just for you.

| Step 1: What routine do I want to add, stop, or change? | | Today's date: |
|---|---|--|
| Step 2: What new routine do I want to try? | | |
| Step 3: What cue will help me remember my new routine? | | |
| Date / Time | Did it work? | Reflection: How is it going? Do I need to change anything? |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | |
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3 | Action Plan Journal

Step 1: Figure out what needs to change

- What routine do you want to add, stop or change?

Step 2: Plan a new routine

- What new routine do you want to try? Remember to be specific and realistic

Step 3: Choose a cue or hint

- What will help you remember your new routine?
- Specific time, place, a feeling, a person, attached to a current routine

Use PT2 Stories for Group Practice

Teo's Story

Teo is at risk for type 2 diabetes. His doctor urges him to lose 20 pounds and work up to at least 150 minutes of activity each week.

Teo and his wife have five children. The kids all play sports, and he spends a lot of time driving them to events. Teo also works full time. On weekends, he works a second, part-time job. When he has some free time, he likes to watch basketball on TV, but he rarely plays it. He spends a lot of time sitting.



Step 1: Figure out what needs to change

- What routine do you want to add, stop or change?
- *I want to get more physical activity and sit less*

Step 2: Plan a new routine

- What new routine do you want to try? Remember to be specific and realistic
- *I want to walk during my son's baseball practice on Tuesday and Thursday evenings for 30 mins*

Step 3: Choose a cue or hint

- What will help you remember your new routine?
- Specific time, place, a feeling, a person, attached to a current routine
- *I will put my tennis shoes in the truck by my kid's baseball bag.*
I will walk during ½ of baseball practice.

The Role of Self-Monitoring in Habit Formation

Action Plan

Use this log to track your progress as you change your routine. Depending on the routine, you may practice several times a day, or a few times a week. Each time you try it, note how it went. If it's not working and you need to change something, write it down too. You don't need to share this log with your Lifestyle Coach. It's just for you.

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3 | Action Plan Journal

New Lifestyle Coach Habits



- Focus on small steps in conversations
- Talk about routines around our eating and activity
- Help participants use willpower and choice in planning their new routines, vs. in the behavior itself
- Provide examples/Practice this approach with the PT2 participant stories to build participant efficacy
- Participants can work and re-work on the same routine for weeks-***after all, repetition is needed***

“What might you need to modify about your cue this next week to better support your new routine”

Language that Supports Habit Formation

Say More

- Create healthy routine
- Develop healthy habits
- What is a small step you could take?
- How can you make the routine easier?
- What new routines might help you work on _____?

Say Less

- How can you stay motivated?
- Use self-control/willpower
- What healthy choices can you make?

Build Your Own Habits With Habits

Action Plan

Use this log to track your progress as you change your routine. Depending on the routine, you may practice several times a day, or a few times a week. Each time you try it, note how it went. If it's not working and you need to change something, write it down too. You don't need to share this log with your Lifestyle Coach. It's just for you.

Step 1: What routine do I want to add, stop, or change? _____ Today's date: _____

Step 2: What new routine do I want to try? _____

Step 3: What cue will help me remember my new routine? _____

| Date / Time | Did it work? | Reflection: How is it going? Do I need to change anything? |
|-------------|---|--|
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3 | Action Plan Journal

- Practice using this new habit formation action plan yourself!!
- The more comfortable you are with this, the easier it will be for you to support your participants!

Summary

- Willpower and self control are not as effective at sustaining repeated actions such as spending, eating & activity
- Habit formation theory offers a promising approach to lifestyle change behaviors
- The habit loop includes the cue, the routine, and the reward
 - Will power and choice should be focus on establishing cues for desirable routines
 - Repetition is key
- Habit formation approach is aligned with the LCP curriculum only requiring subtle shifts in the way LC's talk about action plans and lifestyle behaviors

"Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going."

-Jim Ron

Resources and References

- The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business, Charles Duhigg, 2012
- Good Habits, Bad Habits: The Science of Making Positive Changes that Stick, Wendy Wood, 2019
- Making health habitual: the psychology of ‘habit-formation’ and general practice Br J Gen Pract. 2012 Dec; 62(605): 664–666.doi: 10.3399/bjgp12X659466PMCID: PMC3505409PMID : 23211256
- Cannon et al., Diabetes Care, 2020, 43:2042-2049