

How to Build and Maintain **NEW HABITS**



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When Consistency is So Hard!

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HABITS AND ROUTINES ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF DAILY LIFE.

But how can you build new habits when you are challenged by ADHD and consistency is so hard? What if you thought of your new habit as just one new daily lifestyle change that you repeat until it becomes automatic? Here are strategies to help you to build a new habit, followed by a few pointers on ways to successfully keep that habit going.

Know your why

Before you even thought of the new habit, you already knew the “why” of what you want to do. It likely came from a place of frustration and, at the same time, empowerment. Having that “why” in front of you every day will help you see the change that you want. Your why can be any powerful statement. Make it visual so that every day you see your motivation. Your visual could be a chart, a photo, or any picture that helps you recall your inspiration.

Hold your focus

Changing only one habit at a time creates success. Too many changes, just like too many decisions, is overwhelming and keeps you from focusing on what you need to do. Make that one new habit the one and only, most interesting, and most valuable change you are making. Keep to one change to your lifestyle to make that change stick.

Be specific

Make your habit as specific as possible to avoid decision-making. That habit is a defined action. Instead of a habit of getting a better night’s sleep, make your habit getting in bed at 11 PM or placing your technology devices in their chargers at 10 PM. Decide on these actions before putting your habit into place. By processing the steps and the anchor to your new habit, you eliminate decisions at the time.

Use micro-steps

According to Thrive Global, we undermine new habits by not starting small enough. Micro-steps—small, incremental actions—can have both immediate and long-lasting benefits to the way we live our lives. A micro-step is the smallest action you can take to accomplish a goal. If you want to eat healthier and lose weight, add in one vegetable at each meal. It could be carrot sticks that are pre-cut from your grocery store. That small action is going to make a big difference over time.

Make it easy

Whenever there is an obstacle or an extra step, your new habit is blocked. Make your new habit easy by thinking through the obstacles. Then add in what makes it easy to accomplish. If losing weight is your goal, a new habit of walking more would help you reach your goal. If you keep your sneakers in your car, you are likely to take a walk right after work. If you must go home to change, you might not take a walk.

Keep track

Since habits are a series of single actions, tracking keeps you moving forward. Rather than break the chain of success, you are motivated to keep going. Gather data as you track. There are many apps for this. Just like our smart watches and 10K steps, we want to know our daily success.

Keep it realistic

Keep your perfectionism in check and keep your new habit in sight. Use the first days of your new habit to learn more about you and focus on the process, not just the outcome. What worked and what didn't? What does success look like this week and next?

NOW THAT YOU'RE LAUNCHED ON THAT NEW HABIT, how do you make it stick?

Too many times we fail to get our habit to stick, so we don't have the lasting success we want. Your new habit might have to do with weight loss and a healthy lifestyle, or perhaps with organizing and better productivity. Here are a few tips to help those new behaviors become automatic.

Plan your work and work your plan

There is a famous saying: "A dream without a plan is just a wish." Not only do you need to make a plan, you must write it down. It's in the details that you will find the most success in planning your work. Plan out the steps and when you will do them. Your plan should also include the words you tell yourself about your new habit. Positive self-talk trains your brain to think and act on your behalf. Your brain will believe what you tell it! A new mantra or quote adapted to your success can help you stay on track. That could be, "I can do one step every day to get to my goal." Plan your work down to the details to be sure you know when and where you will do this new habit.



Connect the dots

The strongest habits piggyback on well-established behaviors, adding to the chain of behaviors. Start with an existing habit and find ways to link it to your new habit. If you want to take your vitamins each night, leave them by the toothbrush where you brush your teeth each evening. In the same way, it's easier to go to the gym if it's on the way from your work to home. It's called hooking a habit. See where you can connect the dots.

Reward your new behavior

It's an age-old way to create a new habit, however it could work for you. What reward will you give yourself for a certain number of successes with your new habit? What is enough of a reward? How will you measure your success to get that reward?

Get motivated

Are you inspired by blogs, podcasts, or books? Here are a few references to learn more about habits. There's always one small life hack that can make learning one new habit easier. These experts on habits can give you insight into what to do next, how to be successful, and why habits matter.

- *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, book by Stephen Covey
- *Five Strategies for Building New Habits*, by Michael Hyatt | <https://fullfocus.co/five-strategies-for-changing-bad-habits>
- *Productivityist*, podcast by Mike Vardy | <https://productivityist.com/category/podcast>



Plan your work down to the details to be sure you know when and where you will do this new habit.

- *13 Things to Avoid When Changing Habits*, blog by Leo Babauta on Zen Habits | <https://zenhabits.net/13-things-to-avoid-when-changing-habits>
- *How Simple Mini Habits Can Change Your Life*, blog by Steven Guise on Tiny Buddha | <https://tinybuddha.com/blog/simple-mini-habits-can-change-life>

Limit choices

Research shows that the more choices we have, the harder it is to stick to our plan and create a new habit. If we have too many options, we lose track of the original habit we are working on. Create an unwavering rule to lock in your intention. If your goal is about healthy nutrition, your rule might be, “Drink a glass of water with every meal.” Or “Order a salad with your meal instead of french fries.” The more you practice the one choice you give yourself, the easier it is to create that habit.

Assess obstacles

What obstacles are getting in the way of sticking to your habit? Is it a time issue, a money issue or something else? When you assess the obstacle, you can plan for how you will break through what’s holding you back.

Design your space

Creating a space that encourages your success helps make habits stick. How so? Set up your space to accommodate your new chain of behaviors. If you want to take your medicine at bedtime, place it by your toothbrush. Have a water bottle always handy to be sure you drink eight glasses a day. Pack your running shoes and clothes into your gym bag and place it the door. That way, you make it easy to grab-and-go in the morning, so you’re more likely to stop at the gym on your way home from work. All these small tweaks to where and how you set things up can help you stay true to your habits.

Get your cue

Charles Duhigg writes about building a “habit loop” that supports your new behavior. The three elements of the loop include a cue to initiate the behavior, execution of the behavior, and then a reward for your behavior. Your cue can be an alarm or a Post-it note. Your reward can be just about anything from meeting a friend for coffee to soaking in a bubble bath. Using this strategy helps to cement habits.

CREATING AND STICKING WITH A HABIT can be built on ADHD-friendly strategies that work with how you think and how you get things done. Remember that new habits are a work in progress. If something does not go as you planned, start again with a new actionable behavior. **A**



For over twenty years, **Ellen Delap**, a certified professional organizer and the owner of [Professional-Organizer.com](https://www.professional-organizer.com), has worked one on one with clients, streamlining their environment, creating effective strategies for an organized lifestyle. She specializes in working with individuals with ADHD, helping them reach their organizing and productivity goals. Delap has been featured on the *Smead* podcast, in articles with the *Houston Chronicle*, *New York Times*, and *Associated Press*, and as a speaker with the *ADDA-Southern Region* conferences. She is past president of the *National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals (NAPO)* and is based in Houston, Texas.

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