

Building Healthy Habits & Fostering a Growth Mindset

We may know what actions we could or should take to improve our overall wellbeing, but for many of us, **the difficult part is putting those ideas into action and creating consistency in our daily routines.**

Each day we are making thousands of decisions, both big and small, that add up to determine how we spend our time, how we live our lives, and how we care for ourselves and others. Building a new habit requires us to make different decisions to create a new pattern.

When setting out to build a new habit, first reflect on how your mindset is a foundational element to your success: What is the story you are telling yourself?

Consider whether you are approaching this new habit with preconceived notions, judgements, or even a fixed mindset.

Holding ourselves in a fixed mindset is to consider our abilities, actions, or even intelligence as unchangeable.¹ On the other hand, having a growth mindset allows us to view ourselves as malleable, with the ability to change and grow.¹

For example, say I'd like to start my day with some physical movement in the morning. However, I don't consider myself a morning person. The story I have been telling myself is that I do not and cannot wake up earlier because I am not someone who naturally or energetically wakes up in the morning. If this is a new habit I am wanting to build, then continuing to tell myself that I am not a morning person may be limiting to my intention of taking a morning walk. We don't want to start our habit building with an inner dialogue that says, "I can't because..."

Perhaps try to reframe to: "I am becoming someone who starts my day with movement." We want to approach habit building with a **growth** mindset.

As you work to build healthy habits, consider these three phases:²

1. INITIATION PHASE

Choosing the behavior and setting the context.

- When choosing a habit, it is important to think about your "why" – aim for intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation.
- Aim for small, realistic behavior changes – don't go too big too fast!
- Rather than trying to stop a habit outright, consider focusing on replacing a habit with a new action instead.

2. LEARNING PHASE

The behavior is repeated to strengthen association.

- Set your expectations accordingly – habit building takes longer than you might think. Have you ever heard it said that "it takes 21 days to form a habit?" – think again! It could take several months for a habit to form and become second nature.
- This is when you might have doubts, fears, boredom, or frustration creep in. Anticipate this as part of the growing pains of the learning phase and keep going.
- Stay consistent! Come back to your "why," even when the initial motivation fades.

3. STABILITY PHASE

A habit is maintained with minimal effort moving forward.

- Pause for reflection! What has been going well with forming this habit?
- Where did you hit challenges? Consider what you can do differently in forming your next habit.

This material is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended to be exhaustive, nor should any of the materials be construed as professional or medical advice.

1. Purdue Global. (2024, January 8). What is a growth mindset and how can you develop one? Purdue Global. <https://www.purdueglobal.edu/blog/careers/develop-growth-mindset/>

2. Gardner, B., Lally, P., & Wardle, J. (2012). Making health habitual: the psychology of 'habit-formation' and general practice. *The British journal of general practice : the journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 62(605), 664–666. <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp12X659466>