

WELLNESS CONNECTION

LIVE WELL. WORK WELL.

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HEALTHY HARMONY - Healthy Habits



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If there is one thing that is true, it is that change is inevitable. When we want to make changes to improve our well-being, it can be overwhelming to decide where to start. We want to increase things like physical activity, eating foods that are more nutritious, and getting more sleep. Deciding on which steps to take to improve well-being can become a source of stress.

Human beings thrive on routine, and habits form our routines. Habits are created when our brain assigns automatic behavior responses to our everyday activities. If I take

the stairs to my office every morning, over time my brain does not have to use as much energy to make that decision. It can use the “extra” energy to focus on activities or behaviors that change every day, such as deciding what to have for dinner. There is an awareness involved in making changes, and a key part of building awareness is to understand how our brain creates habits.

James Clear, author of “Atomic Habits,” explains a simple and thought-provoking [framework for the process of building a habit](#). Habits form through four consecutive stages: cue, craving, response, and reward. All four stages rely on habits to have a reward that gives our brain an incentive to remember the outcome of the particular habit. Clear also assigns four laws to each of these stages and outlines the basis for creating good habits.

Once you understand how habits are formed, you can take another step towards increased awareness by asking yourself what stage of change you are in right now. Changing habits can be hard and often takes time. Drawing from the transtheoretical model, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) outlines [four stages of change](#) for developing or changing your habits:

1. **Contemplation:** *“I’m thinking about it.”* Includes a pros and cons chart for weighing common decisions such as healthy eating and physical activity.
2. **Preparation:** *“I have made up my mind to take action.”* Includes a chart outlining possible roadblocks and solutions when you start to change your habits.
3. **Action:** *“I have started to make changes.”* Includes steps to stick with your newly formed habits.
4. **Maintenance:** *“I have a new routine.”* Includes ideas for staying motivated and taking setbacks in stride.

I often wonder why I do not do the things that I *know* will benefit my well-being. After reading these articles, I am more aware that I have some successful habits (like flossing) and some not-so-successful habits (like late night snacking). Change is a process and better managed if you concentrate on one habit at a time. Good luck!

