How long does it take to form a habit?

By ThoughtCo.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.19.17
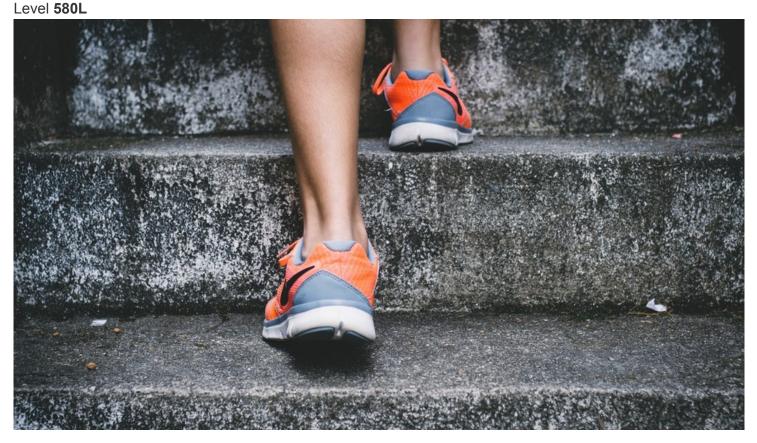
Word Count **458**

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Image 1. Learning good habits lets you become a healthier person. Photo from Pixabay.

A habit is a behavior that you repeat. Habits can be good or bad. How do habits form? Many experts say you're very likely to form a new habit if you just repeat a behavior for a certain number of days.

Some habits form easily. Other habits are harder to stick to.

Here are some tips for making new habits.

1. Define Small, Specific Goals

Make a small, specific goal. For example, don't set the goal of "being more organized." Try instead to set the goal to "clean my room and vacuum every Sunday morning." It's a specific behavior. You can repeat it over and over until it becomes automatic.

2. Make It Easy For Yourself

Think of ways to get around the things blocking you from making a new habit. Try to make things easier. Ask yourself this question: "What is stopping me from forming a new habit?"

Let's say you want to eat healthier with your family. You're motivated to make the change and you enjoy eating healthy food. So why won't the habit stick?

Perhaps your parents are too tired to cook after work. They might end up ordering unhealthy fast food. What are some ways to make things easier? How can you work around the problem?

Maybe you could choose one weekend afternoon each week. On that day, you could prepare meals for the next five days.

3. Get An Accountability Partner

Having someone to check in with you about your goal can be helpful. Being held accountable to another person motivates people. Find an accountability partner. An accountability partner can be someone working toward the same goal as you. Let's say you're trying to build an exercise habit. Find a friend who wants to hit the gym. Set up a shared workout schedule.

4. Use External And Internal Reminders

Use external reminders. These are tools that might help you remember to stick to new habits. Some examples are post-it notes, to-do lists and daily alarms.

Create internal reminders. You might find yourself trapped in a pattern of bad thoughts. Use mental reminders to break the pattern. Repeat a statement whenever negative thoughts arise. What should you do if you catch yourself thinking "I hate going to the gym"? Just fight the thought with something like this: "...but I love how energized I feel after a workout."

5. Give Yourself Time

Don't stress if you slip up one day. Developing new habits takes time.

Quiz

1   Which of the following is a MAIN idea of the article?

    (A)   People have a hard time remembering to clean and vacuum.

    (B)   Preparing meals on the weekends is a good way to form healthy habits.

    (C)   Using lists and daily alarms is the best way to remember new habits.

    (D)   There are small things you can do to make it easier to form good habits.

2   What is the MAIN idea of the section "Get An Accountability Partner"?

    (A)   Some people like exercising in large groups.

    (B)   It can be helpful to form new habits with someone else.

    (C)   Going to the gym can help you build better habits.

    (D)   Cooking better meals is one way to get healthier.

3   The author thinks small, specific goals are better than big, general goals when trying to form a new habit.

    Why?

    (A)   because it can be easier to remember a lot of little things than one big thing

    (B)   because most people only want to make small, specific changes

    (C)   because it is easy to repeat a small, specific behavior until it becomes automatic

    (D)   because most people do not want to set big goals like becoming more organized

4   The author has an opinion about how you should feel if you have a hard time sticking to a habit.

    Which selection from the article shows this?

    (A)   A habit is a behavior that you repeat. Habits can be good or bad.

    (B)   You're motivated to make the change and you enjoy eating healthy food.

    (C)   You might find yourself trapped in a pattern of bad thoughts.

    (D)   Don't stress if you slip up one day. Developing new habits takes time.