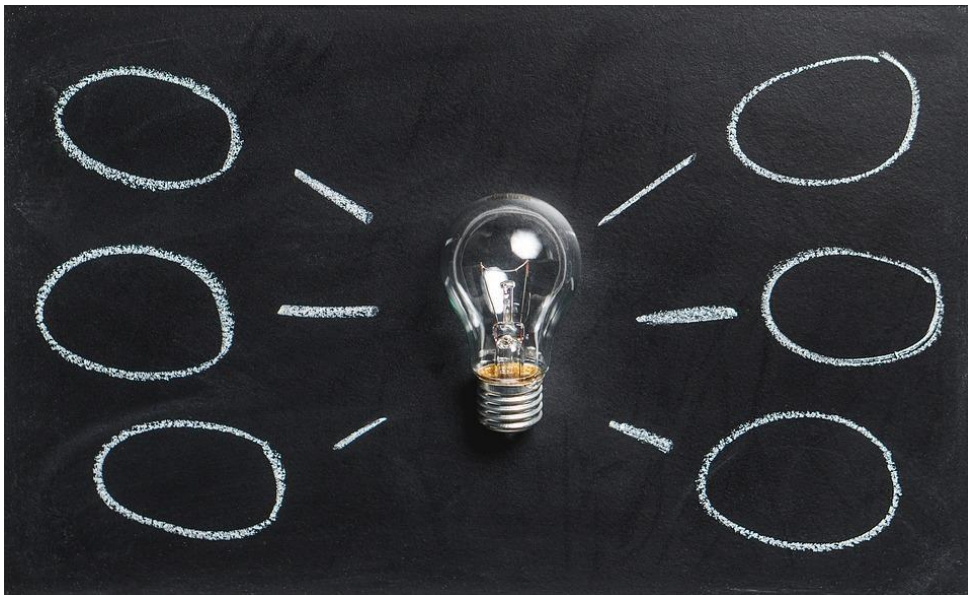


Hardwiring New Habits



- 1 **Have you ever stopped to think about all of the habits you have? Seriously, everything from brushing your teeth in the morning to drinking a Diet Coke for lunch can all be considered habits that make us who we are. Even though the new year has been a traditional time to form new habits or quit the old ones, the arrival of spring symbolically represents a “fresh start”. Start thinking about what you could do with the arrival of the new season to promote growth, positivity, and constructive habits in your own life.**

If you do a quick Google search, you’ll probably discover that it takes somewhere

- 2 **around 21 days to form a habit. Some experts say that the time to form a habit is longer, or even shorter than 21 days but all researchers would agree that when it comes to habits, consistency is the key. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if forming a new, positive habit was as easy as consistently performing a task, though? When considering the human brain as a whole, it quickly becomes evident that consistency isn’t always easy. What about when the habit gets uncomfortable? What happens when you start to slack off and resort to your old ways?**

The ease of the new habit generally depends on the strength and age of the old

- 3 **habit. Establishing healthy eating habits would obviously be easier if you already tried to select foods that were full of nutrients and vitamins essential to leading a healthy lifestyle. However, if you are accustomed to chomping down fast food cheeseburgers and chugging sodas at every meal, forming healthy eating habits won’t be nearly as simple. Your body will literally crave what it is used to. Scientific research has proven that the more you perform a task or action, the more it becomes physically cemented in your brain. This phenomenon is known as**

neurplasticity. Neurons in our brain make connections the more consistent we are when it comes to repeating things. Of course, this can be good or bad as some of our habits aren't always the best for our health.

- 4 When trying to form new, consistent habits, there are a few steps, ideas, and tricks that you can employ to make the process easier.

Set Specific, Measurable Goals

If your goals are too broad, how will you ever know when you've reached them?

Instead of forming the goal: Be more kind to others, consider creating a goal you can

- 5 **literally check off of a list such as: Volunteer at the local soup kitchen twice a month and help my mom with the dishes at least twice a week. If your goal is to get in shape, how will you know when it's achieved? Think about how much easier it would be to track something like going to the gym 3 times a week or eating vegetables instead of cheese fries on the weekend. You must make sure that your goals are specific so that you will actually know when you have achieved them.**

Making or breaking a habit is very similar to rewiring your brain. If you are able to

- 6 "show" your brain a different way of doing things, the routine will be interrupted. Therefore, a person must be intentional and disciplined when it comes to forming new habits. In order to create a visual representation of breaking old habits and beginning new habits, some people resort to making a "habit tracker" for the week or even more long term planing periods. To create a habit tracker, simply add up the number of habits you'll want to "track". Place these in boxes in a column running vertically. Next, create one box for each day of the month beside each habit. These "day" boxes will run horizontally. Once completed, your habit tracker will look similar to this:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Read Book							
Go to Gym							
Study Math Notes							

You would simply color in the box underneath the day and the new habit that you

- 7 were able to practice. Sometimes visualizing the new routine will help your brain see your strengths and any growth areas that may need attention.

Remind Yourself

Have you ever forgotten to take out the trash? Buy Gatorade at the store? See your

8 teacher after class? The easiest way to hold yourself accountable when it comes to habits is to force yourself NOT to forget. The simplest way to do this is to set silent

reminders on your cell phone or watch. You'll already be checking notifications and text messages, so when an alert pops up to "be more positive" or "hit the gym today", you won't have any excuse. You're literally interrupting your normal routine **with reminders of your new habit.**

Even if you don't have a cell phone, or you like more concrete reminders, you can **always leave yourself notes. Use sticky notes in strategic places - like your bathroom mirror, your closet, or on the front of your favorite book to spark positive**

9 motivation every time you go to do something that you've already ingrained in your **brain. Research shows that having a visual reminder of your goal not only pushes the new habit to the forefront of your brain, but it also increases confidence that you'll reach your goal.**

Consider an Accountability Partner

10 Have you ever heard the old adage, "misery loves company"? Consider your friends **and peer group for a moment. Are they cheering you on and pushing you to be the best version of yourself? Do they value your overall health and well-being? Do they support you making positive changes in your own life? If you cannot answer those questions with a resounding, "YES!"** then it may be time to consider expanding your **friend group.**

Some people are so miserable with their own lives that they find it hard to motivate others to be their best selves. Think about it: have you ever known someone who

11 **tried to encourage you to skip school with them? What about lie to your parents?** When you think about it, it's really no fun to be in trouble on your own. **These people thrive off of bringing you down and making sure you share in their misery.**

When you choose those who you hang out with wisely, you are making choices that will positively affect your life. Select a friend group that you can share your goals

12 with and who will check in with you to see the progress you're making toward those **goals.** Have a friend text you each week asking you how you're doing on your goals. You'll be really surprised to see how much harder you'll work toward positive growth **when you know someone will be asking about your progress.**

As a whole, forming new habits or breaking old ones proves to be a stupendous

13 task. Rewiring the brain isn't as easy as **remembering how to ride a bike, but forming new habits could be the gear that kicks your life into positive overdrive!**

1. Reread the 2nd paragraph:

If you do a quick Google search, you'll probably discover that it takes somewhere around 21 days to form a habit. Some experts say that the time to form a habit is longer, or even shorter than 21 days but all researchers would agree that when it comes to habits, consistency is the key. Wouldn't it be wonderful if forming a new, positive habit was as easy as consistently performing a task, though? When considering the human brain as a whole, it quickly becomes evident that consistency isn't always easy. What about when the habit gets uncomfortable? What happens when you start to slack off and resort to your old ways?

Why did the author choose to include this paragraph?

- A. To show the simplicity of choosing which habits are best for one's overall health
 - B. To show the reader that multiple different factors play into the likely success of beginning a new habit
 - C. To show the reader the scientific framework behind brain patterns
 - D. To show the difficulty of breaking old habits before a new one can be started
2. What is the significance of the text's structure?
- A. By developing a list of suggestions, the author reinforces her original claim that creating new habits is difficult, but not impossible.
 - B. By showing a chronological outline of topics, the author is able to display her knowledge of scientific research on habits
 - C. By using a list of consequences the author reveals the dangers of bad habits
 - D. By utilizing personal anecdotes the author indicates the importance of developing lifelong habits
3. Which word could replace stupendous in the last paragraph and mean nearly the same thing?
- A. Irritating
 - B. Simplistic
 - C. Monotonous
 - D. Monumental
4. How does the simile in paragraph 13 contribute to the central idea of the text?
- A. It pushes the reader to think about how consistency and practice are the keys to creating new habits that "stick" for a lifetime.
 - B. It pushes the reader to think about how gears in our brains turn involuntarily, therefore we should be careful about which habits we choose to pursue.
 - C. It pushes the reader to see how harmful habits from childhood carry over into adulthood.
 - D. It pushes the reader to see how habits aren't going to be created in adulthood.
5. What is the main idea of paragraph 5?
- A. The larger the goal, the greater the habit that will be formed.

- B. Personal goals should be broad so that they are easy to “hit” as we track our habits.
 - C. Setting specific goals is crucial when it comes to making habits stick and tracking the progress along the way.
 - D. The smaller the goal, the more likely we are to give up along the way and fall back into old habits.
6. Which of the following quotes from the text accurately reflects the author’s claim?
- F. “... all researchers would agree that when it comes to habits, consistency is the key.”
 - G. “You’re literally interrupting your normal routine with reminders of your new habit. “
 - H. “If your goals are too broad, how will you ever know when you’ve reached them?”
 - I. “When considering the human brain as a whole, it quickly becomes evident that consistency isn’t always easy. “
7. How does the suggestion in paragraph 6 support the argument in paragraph 3?
- F. The suggestion supports the idea that our brains thrive off of consistency and repetitiveness.
 - G. The suggestion supports the notion that our brains need breaks in between habits in order to use their neuroplasticity.
 - H. The suggestion indicates that we don’t really have control over our brains, therefore we should turn to science for the answers.
 - I. The suggestion implies that we need to make a conscious effort to eliminate negativity so that the good habits will be brought to the spotlight.
8. Which of the following tone words could be used to explain the author’s attitude in the selection?
- F. Arrogant
 - G. Excited
 - H. Explanatory
 - I. Amicable