

Seven Steps to Developing a New Habit

How long does it take to develop a new habit? The time period can be any length from a single second to several years. The speed of new habit pattern development is largely determined by *the intensity of the emotion* that accompanies the decision to begin acting in a particular way.

Many people think, talk about and resolve to lose weight and become physically fit. This may go on for years. Then one day, the doctor says that, *“If you don’t get your weight down and improve your physical condition, you are in danger of dying at an early age.”*

Suddenly, the thought of dying can be so intense or frightening that the individual immediately changes his diet, begins exercising, stops smoking and becomes a healthy and fit person. Psychologists refer to this as a *“significant emotional experience,”* or a *“SEE.”* Any experience of intense joy or pain, combined with a behavior, can create a habitual behavior pattern that may endure for the rest of a person’s life.

For example, putting your hand on a hot stove or touching a live electrical wire will give you an intense and immediate pain or shock. The experience may only take a split second. But for the rest of your life, you will have developed the habit of not putting your hand on hot stoves, or touching live electrical wires. The habit will have been formed instantly, and endure permanently.

According to the experts, it takes about 21 days to form a habit pattern of medium complexity. By this, we mean simple habits such as getting up earlier at a specific hour, exercising each morning before you start out, listening to audio programs in your car, going to bed at a certain hour, being punctual for appointments, planning every day in advance, starting with your most important tasks each day, or completing your tasks before you start something else. These are habits of medium complexity that can be quite easily developed in 14-21 days through practice and repetition.

How do you develop a new habit? Over the years, a simple, powerful, proven methodology has been determined for new habit development. It is very much like a recipe for preparing a dish in the kitchen. You can use it to develop any habit that you desire. Over time, you will find it easier and easier to develop the habits that you want to incorporate into your personality.

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First, [make a decision](#) Decide clearly that you are going to begin acting in a specific way 100% of the time, whenever that that behavior is required. For example, if you decide to arise early and exercise each morning, set your clock for a specific time, and when the alarm goes off, immediately get up, put on your exercise clothes and begin your exercise session.

Second, never allow an exception to your new habit pattern during the formative stages. Don’t make excuses or rationalizations. Don’t let yourself off the hook. If you resolve to get up at 6:00 AM each morning, discipline yourself to get up at 6:00 AM, every single morning until this becomes automatic.

Third, tell others that you are going to begin practicing a particular behavior. It is amazing how much more disciplined and determined you will become when you know that others are watching you to see if you have the [willpower](#) to follow through on your resolution.

Fourth, visualize yourself performing or behaving in a particular way in a particular situation. The more often you visualize and imagine yourself acting as if you already had the new habit, the more rapidly this new behavior will be accepted by your subconscious mind and become automatic.

Fifth, create an affirmation that you repeat over and over to yourself. This repetition dramatically increases the speed at which you develop the new habit. For example, you can say something like; “I get up and get going immediately at 6:00 AM each morning!” Repeat these words the last thing before you fall asleep. In most cases, you will automatically wake up minutes before the alarm clock goes off, and soon you will need no alarm clock at all.

Sixth, resolve to persist in the new behavior until it is so automatic and easy that you actually feel uncomfortable when you do not do what you have decided to do.

Seventh, and most important, give yourself a reward of some kind for practicing in the new behavior. Each time you reward yourself, you reaffirm and reinforce the behavior. Soon you begin to associate, at an unconscious level, the pleasure of the reward with the behavior. You set up your own force field of positive consequences that you unconsciously look forward to as the result of engaging in the behavior or habit that you have decided upon.