

Seven science-backed tips for forming habits that stick

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Banishing bad habits and converting them to good ones is not easy. As Mark Twain once wrote, “Habit is habit, and not to be flung out the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs one step at a time.” But how do we coax the bad habit down the stairs and out the door while encouraging the new one up the stairs and into the parlor?

Changing a habit takes several concrete steps; you cannot just make a proclamation about your weight or introversion and expect that it will come to pass. Changing behavior requires replacing undesirable mental cues and associations with constructive ones—that is, rewiring your brain through thoughts and deeds. All learning is a gradual process of forging new mental connections and reinforcing them through practice so that the desired action becomes the natural impulse over time.

As the co-authors of *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*, we have devised seven steps to setting new habits. We use the goal of losing weight through alterations to diet and exercise as our example here, but the same techniques work for any habit you wish to banish or cultivate: The challenge is to replace the undesirable habit (parking in a corner at parties and stuffing in the chips) with desirable ones (snacking less and spicing the revelry with your wit).