

TO YOUR HEALTH

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Habit Stacking

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We are now about halfway into 2023. Are you sticking to your resolutions? If your answer is NO, there is a different way to build a new habit and it is called "habit stacking". For most of us, finding an effective technique for building, breaking, and keeping habits can feel like a hopeless endeavor. Habit building is challenging. The neurons in our brains are strongest for those behaviors we already practice, and very weak for those we don't. We are wired for what we're used to, but it doesn't mean you can't add a new habit.

Out of all the helpful tips and tricks out there, there is one simple and effective technique you may not have heard of yet: *habit stacking*. It involves "stacking" the new behavior you are trying to adopt onto a current behavior to help you remember to do it and perform it with less mental effort. It utilizes the strong synaptic connections we already have.

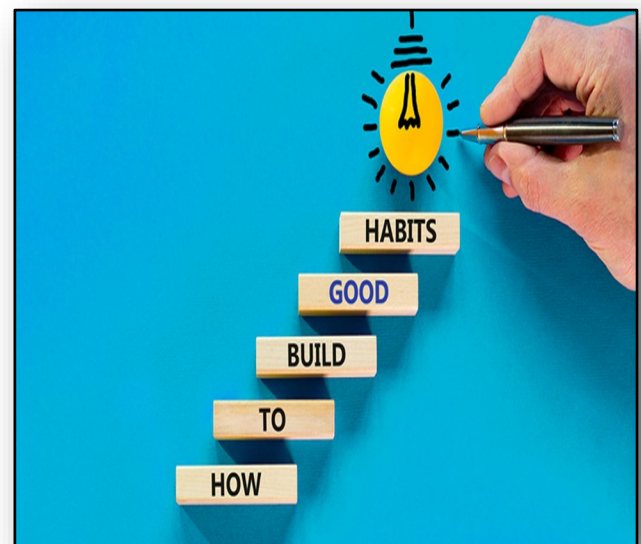
For example, your goal might be to drink more water throughout the day, so you decide you are going to start drinking a glass of water every morning. Don't just assume you will start doing it because it probably won't last long. Instead, pair that new habit with a small, everyday habit or routine you already do, one that is concrete, specific, and consistent. Decide: "After brushing my teeth in the morning, I am going to drink a glass of water." You stack them together and create a small, but growing chain. Every morning, those 2 actions should be associated with each other: brush teeth, drink water. The more regularly you do it, the more automatic it will become.



"Habit stacking is a really effective strategy for building new habits because it builds off of the existing neural networks in our brains," explains Melissa Ming Foynes, PhD, licensed psychologist, holistic wellness coach, international educator and consultant, and mindfulness, meditation, and yoga teacher. *"When you identify a daily action or habit you already engage in, add a new habit, or make a change before or after the existing habit. Rather than strengthening an entirely new neural network, you're capitalizing on a structure and cycle that already exists in your brain."*

Habit stacking provides a built-in reminder. Foynes also notes that this strategy works beyond the neuro-physiological level. *"The existing habit serves as a helpful cue to engage in the new habit you are trying to develop."*

Habit stacking makes habit changes less overwhelming.



Habit Stack your Way to a Better You

1. Start small.

"Research shows that consistency of practice is more effective than the duration of practice in helping us make changes in our lives," according to Foynes.

"Doing something everyday for five minutes is more likely to result in sustainable change than practicing something once a week for 30 minutes." With that in mind, it is easier to be consistent when the goal or task is attainable. The more realistic, the more likely you are to do it, feel successful, and do it again!

2. Consider all your options.

When first getting started, make 2 lists: One of the things you do every single day, and another of events that occur or things that happen to you everyday. Now you can choose the best building block on which to stack another one.

3. Be extremely specific.

If either your new goal or current cue are too vague, you'll struggle.

4. Choose a realistic cue.

To set yourself up for success, select your current habit wisely, taking into account the realities of your life.

5. Give yourself a timeline.

It's helpful to set yourself a concrete window of time. When goals are too open-ended you can feel less motivated to work on them. Establishing a timeline helps reinforce the commitment you're making to work on this new habit.

Natural Triggers On Which to Stack

Brush teeth	Walk dog
Shower	Check email
Coffee	Change into PJs
Eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner	

Please check out the June Fitness Center bulletin board to learn more about Habit Stacking.

The Mighty Nineties

The Mighty Nineties group has been meeting for a few months. Here are some reflections from fellow Residents who are in their Nineties.

Being in your nineties is like...

"An exercise in acceptance of many changes and learning to enjoy many new challenges and things to be grateful for. My family keeps me happy. Including a dog brings joy as does the fascination of the children's learning and loving."



"White water rafting – out of ones control, going at a fast speed, ups and downs. Some good, some not so good, surprises abound. To be continued..."

"Being given a meal bag I didn't order that turns out to be all delicious for the moment."

"Being given more years of life without endless problems – that matter."

"Having the 'endless problems' (only one foot, no hearing, only one eye, only one really workable arm) and still being cheerful. Things don't matter so much anymore!"

"A dream. Never thought I would live so long."

"Playing football - After four quarters I am in overtime. (Warren Buffett, Age 91)"

"Being surprised to be here!"

"Starting life again."

