

12 HEALTHY HABITS TO START TODAY



Knowing that healthy habits can help us live a longer, happier and more satisfied life is a strong motivator for many of us to kick our poor lifestyle choices. So why is starting and maintaining new healthy habits so hard and frustrating? We have compiled a list of healthy habits that you can start right now along with some tips for making them stick and minimising the frustration of setbacks.





Alright, you don't need to rise and shine with the sun every morning, but waking up at a decent (early) hour is essential for optimal health. The human body and brain have evolved to follow a circadian rhythm that helps to regulate sleep and wake patterns that are set by our natural environment, specifically the rising and setting of the sun. This natural circadian rhythm also corresponds with the body's natural cortisol levels: a hormone well known for its role in our metabolism, immune system, stress response, and energy levels. In a balanced state, cortisol levels start to rise 2-3 hours after the onset of sleep and continue to rise into the early morning helping to wake us. Cortisol levels in the body will then peak around 8:30 am or 9:00 am and continue to gradually decline as the day continues. Therefore, following the body's natural circadian rhythm and cortisol levels is a simple way to maximize energy levels, productivity, and overall health.

Wake up early



Start with water

Staying hydrated is vital for our health and although we've heard it many times, it's often overlooked. Our bodies are 60% water and not drinking enough water can lead to more than just dehydration. In fact, low levels of dehydration are linked to fatigue, headaches, and increased cravings. Although it is imperative to drink water throughout the day, one of the best (and easiest) times to drink water is first thing in the morning. So, before you start sipping on your morning brew, drink a glass of water. Not only is it refreshing, but it can help to hydrate the body while aiding digestion and metabolism at the same time.

Make time for movement

Humans are designed to move but as we create more sedentary lifestyles we are moving less and less. Many of us work, travel, and relax sitting down, so it is becoming increasingly important to create ways to move since they are no longer occurring organically. With less physical activity in our day, we must carve out specific time for movement in our lives. Exercise has tremendous health benefits for both the body and the mind and there are so many different ways to create movement in your day. Whether you love biking, swimming, dancing, or going to the gym, it is imperative that you find some form of movement that you enjoy and make time for it on a daily basis.



Getting fresh air on a regular basis is one of the easiest ways to improve your overall health. Exposure to the sun enables the body to produce vitamin D, which has been shown to have many essential functions in the body. Deficiency in vitamin D has been linked to fatigue, weakened immune system, bone and back pain, low mood, and depression. Ironically, vitamin D is one of the most commonly supplemented vitamins, while daily exposure to the sun could prove to be a simple solution to this concern. So, whether it's spring, summer, winter, or fall, ensure that you spend some time outside every single day.

Spend
time
outside

Eat sitting down

When it's time to eat, sit down. Not only does the act of sitting down help to ensure that we are not mindlessly eating in front of the pantry, but eating while sitting down helps to support digestion. Eating while sitting down forces you to slow down and chew the food you are eating, which is the first (and most important) step in the digestive process. The act of sitting down also helps to ensure that the body is in a more optimal postural position for the digestive system. So, if you constantly find yourself munching everywhere around the house, implement this simple guideline of eating while sitting down to help bring more awareness to your food and your health.

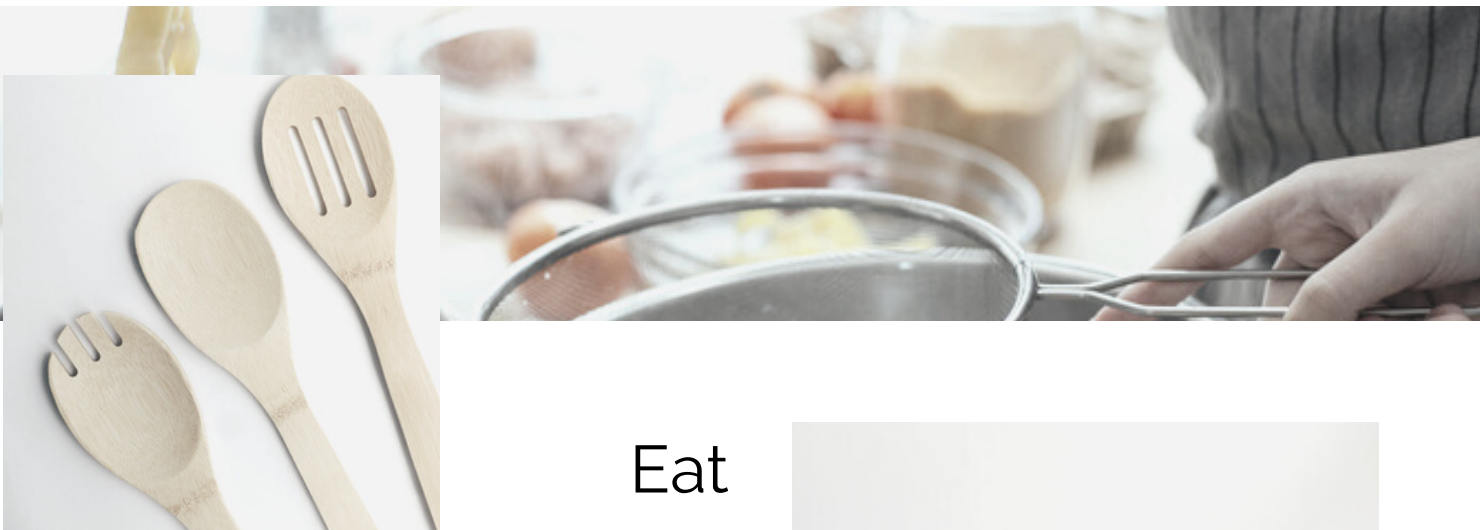


Go for a walk

Walking is one of the most underrated healthy habits you can do. Walking is often overlooked because it's so simple or it "doesn't burn that many calories" but science shows that putting one foot in front of the other can lead to some impressive mental and physical health benefits. Not only does walking improve fitness, and cardiovascular markers and help to prevent weight gain, but it has also been shown to improve posture, mood, circulation, the risk for chronic disease, as well as alleviate fatigue and depression. Moreover, going for a walk every day, long or short, can help to increase the amount of time spent outside and exposure to sunlight, further supporting the body's production of vitamin D and natural circadian rhythm.

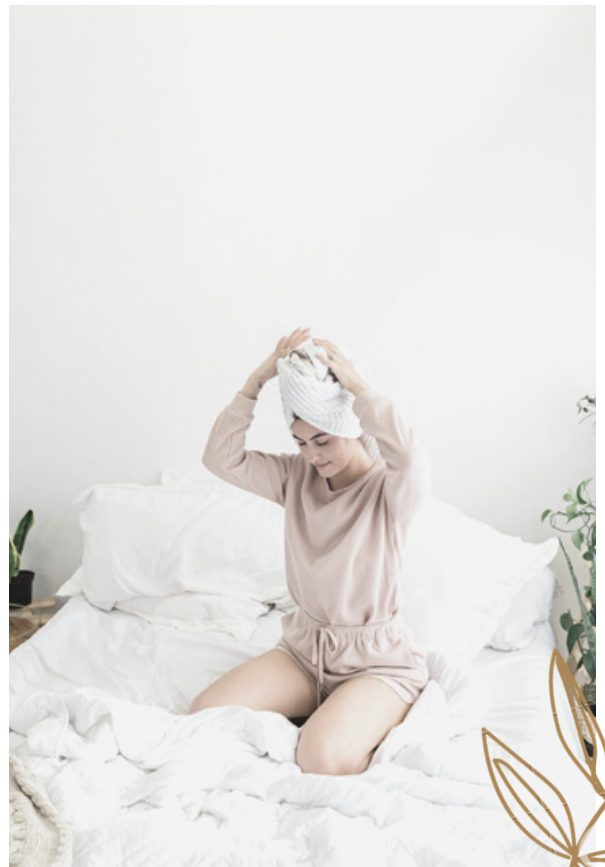
Take time to cook

Learning to cook is one of the simplest healthy daily habits you can do and one of the greatest gifts you can give to your health. Although cooking is often thought of as a “chore” it is, in fact, a basic human skill that is required to satisfy a basic human need. Not only does cooking help to control the quality of the food that you eat, but it helps to create more appreciation for your food and a connection to it. If you are just reheating food in the oven every night or ordering takeout it will be more challenging to bring mindfulness to your eating habits and your food. Moreover, cooking is a simple form of self-care that you can practice every single day, making it one of the most beneficial healthy daily habits.



Eat well

This is certainly not the first time you’ve been told to eat vegetables! Not only are vegetables whole foods but they are rich in vitamins, and minerals and are great sources of fiber, which can help to maintain a healthy gut, and prevent constipation and other digestion issues. Consuming vegetables regularly lowers the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke, compared with individuals who ate less than 3 servings per day. By adding more vegetables to your diet, there becomes less and less room for processed foods, refined carbohydrates, and added sugars. So, instead of focusing on what not to eat, focus on what you can eat and eat more of it.



Put your phone away

Putting away your phone (tablet or computer) might seem like a simple challenge, but being connected 24/7 can have many negative side effects on our health. The average person has eight social media accounts and spends at least 2 hours and 24 minutes checking their phone every day. Just think of all the time that could be spent outside, moving, exercising, or cooking! This constant digital connection can increase perceived stress and constant exposure to blue light has been shown to suppress the production of body's natural melatonin production, which is integral to the body's natural circadian rhythm and sleep patterns. So instead of cruising the web until the wee hours of the morning, turn off your phone at least one hour before bed and allow yourself to relax and unwind without the digital stress.



End the day with a clean kitchen

Whether you are aware or not, the physical space we live in has a large effect on how we behave. A messy bedroom, cluttered living room, and dirty kitchen can all have a negative impact on our mental state and our health. Not only does tidying up help to make things like cooking and exercise easier, by creating more space and time, but it decreases frustration, improves efficiency, and can serve as a catalyst for further change. So, after every meal, do the dishes and put things away or, at the very least, do the dishes at the end of the day. Going to bed with a clean kitchen allows you to wake up to a fresh start without having to deal with yesterday's mess.

Read something

Reading has benefits to both your physical and mental health and those benefits can last a lifetime. Not only can reading stimulate growth, but it can help to reduce stress, prevent age-related cognitive decline and promote a good night's sleep. Reading is the workout for your mental health and, the same way you take care of your body, it's important to take care of your brain.

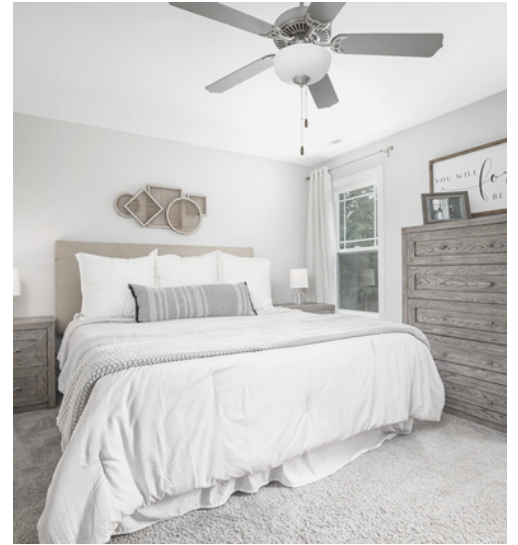
Get to bed early

Sleep is the only time during the day when our bodies are able to relax, unwind and recover. Unfortunately, many people are falling short of the recommended 8 hours of sleep per night and this can have devastating impacts on our health. Many people are putting off bedtime in favor of other activities; including television, social media, and video games, but over time this can come at the cost of our health. Lack of sleep, or poor quality sleep, has been linked to memory issues, mood changes, weakened immunity, altered eating behavior, and increased aging. Not to mention, sleep has been shown to support weight loss given lack of sleep has been shown to create hormone imbalances in insulin, leptin, cortisol, and many other hormones, which have a profound impact on weight. Moreover, going to bed earlier will actually make waking up early easier, which is one of the most important healthy daily habits you can do. So, if you are a night owl, try to get to bed a little earlier by giving yourself a curfew because, let's be honest, nothing productive happens after 10:00 pm. Turn off digital devices, turn down the lights, read a book and focus on getting restful shut-eye.





5 Ways to make a new habit stick



1. Start Small

If your habit is to hike regularly, you're not going to climb Everest this weekend. If you have a big goal, like getting a new job, running a marathon, or going to the gym five days a week, you need to break your goal down into increments. For example, if you want to run a marathon and you're not much of a runner, try running two miles a day three days a week, and build on that. If you try and do too much, you will most likely fail and destroy your morale. Have patience, start small, and build on your progress.

2. Know Your Excuses

What gets in the way of this habit? Is it because you're tired? Or did you run out of time? Or did you forget your gym clothes or pack your lunch? Whatever habit you're failing to form, consider what is preventing your success. Once you nail down your usual excuses, you can address them.

3. Enable Your New Habits

Set yourself up for success. If you do not go to the gym because you forget your gym clothes, start packing them the night before. If you are forgetting to pack your lunch, pack it the night before. Too tired to go to the gym? Schedule a time and treat it like an appointment. Enable your habits by addressing your usual excuses and obstacles and preparing for success.

4. Don't Sweat Failure

Everyone fails, and at some point, you will as well and that is just fine. Whether you cheat on a diet, skip a workout, fail to send a job application that day, or whatever it is, just get back in the saddle tomorrow. Success is often about not giving up in spite of rejection and failure, so do not lose heart when you experience a setback, keep working.

5. Keep Track

What gets measured gets managed. If you are trying to get a new job, keep track of how many applications you send and how many network connections you make and build on it. Measuring your progress also helps keep you motivated as you work towards your goal.