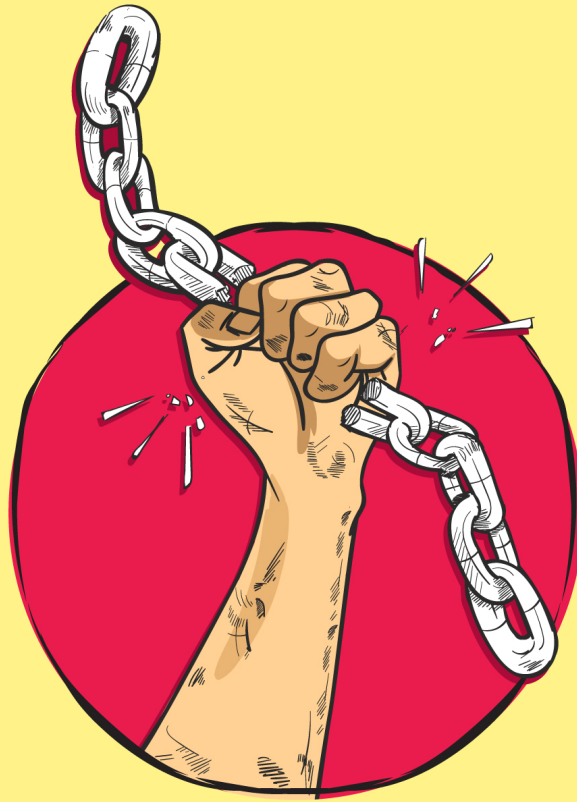


SUMMARY

ATOMIC

HABITS

JAMES CLEAR



Summary of “Atomic Habits” by James Clear

Written by Lea Schullery

Learn about the easy and proven way to build good habits and break the bad ones.



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Introduction

If you're looking to get your life back on track, then *Atomic Habits* offers an easy framework for improving your life every day. James Clear, one of the world's leading experts on habit formation reveals strategies to help you form good habits and break the bad ones. You'll also learn to recognize how tiny daily habits can have an incredible impact on your life and your future. If you find that you struggle to change your habits, the problem isn't you, but your system. You see, your brain is wired to complete activities that are both easy and provide immediate gratification. Luckily, James Clear provides a proven system that will help you change your habits and take your life to new heights. Through this book, you will learn how to make time for new habits, overcome a lack of motivation and willpower, design your environment to make success easier, and learn how tracking your habits and finding an accountability partner will help you succeed.

Why Small Habits Can Make A Big Difference

When it comes to success, many people are focused on the wrong thing. They focus on the end goal versus the journey it takes to get there, and believe big decisions will get them to their final destination. However, this couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, one percent of improvement each day means that you will be thirty-seven times better than you once were, but if you decline one percent a day, you will decline nearly to zero. In other words, it's the small habits that matter and that make the biggest difference.

For example, a plane traveling from Los Angeles to New York requires a specific degree of direction to get to its final destination. Imagine if the pilot adjusted its course just 3.5 degrees south. This may look like nothing to the average observer, the adjustment is so small, many people wouldn't even notice. Of course, upon landing, the passengers would notice a *big* difference. That small course adjustment would change their final destination from New York to Washington D.C.

We don't typically notice tiny changes because the impact is not seen immediately. The impact may not be seen for months, or even years, but the results can be enormous. For instance, eating a slice of pizza certainly won't make you unhealthy; however, if you eat a slice of pizza every night for dinner, then you'll likely see a change in weight over the course of a year. Similarly, taking a 30-minute yoga class one day won't immediately make you in shape. Instead, it's small habits over time that compound into major results.

Results in life are a measure of habits. The net worth of a person is simply a measure of their financial habits, similarly, a person's health is a measure of their daily habits of diet exercise. Time magnifies the margin between success and failure which is why our daily choices have a greater impact than we realize. If you want to predict where you'll end up in life, then simply follow the curve of your daily choices. Bad habits can affect us just

as easily as a good habit can build us up, this is why it's important to understand how you can design your daily habits to your advantage. The key is to make tiny changes to your behavior, which when repeated over and over, will become habits that lead to big results.

How Habits Are Formed

How many times do you begin a good habit, like exercise or meditation, only to find that after a few days or weeks it's only become a real hassle? Habits are a challenge to change because many people try to change them the wrong way or try to change the wrong things. To change our habits we must first understand how habits are formed. The process of habit building can be classified into four steps: cue, craving, response, and reward.

Think about what you do when you first get into your car. You probably put the key in the ignition, put on your seatbelt, check your mirrors, and then head on your way. You don't even think about the process, you just do it. It's a habit that you've repeated so many times that it's become instinct and happens automatically. So how are habits formed? Habits begin with a cue, or a trigger, to act. For instance, getting into your car cues you to perform an action that will get you from one destination to the next. The second step is craving for a change in state, in this case, you want to go somewhere. Your response is to put the car in drive and go. The final step is the reward, a feeling of relief or comfort that comes from arriving at your destination safely.

This habit loop can be applied to many habits that you complete daily. For instance, brushing your teeth in the morning. Your cue might be eating breakfast or drinking coffee, triggering a craving to feel fresh and clean. Your response is to head to the bathroom sink and prepare your toothbrush. Your reward is a mouth that feels fresh and makes you ready to take on your day.

The cue always triggers a craving, which motivates a response. Then a reward is provided, satisfying the craving and becoming affiliated with the cue. Our behaviors are driven by a desire to solve a particular problem which is part of the cue and craving phase of the habit loop. For instance, the problem phase might include the cue of your phone buzzing with a new text message. The craving is that you want to learn the contents of that

message. Then comes the solution phase. You respond by grabbing and unlocking your phone. The reward is satisfying the craving to read the message.

Of course, these habits aren't all that bad; however, when we adopt unhealthy or bad habits, we see the effects years later and the habits become harder to break. That's why it's important to understand the habit loop, so you can learn how to replace your cues, cravings, responses, and rewards to create better habits. Let's see how you can begin creating better habits.

Make It Obvious

When it comes to cues, such as the buzzing of our phone or the drinking of coffee, we are prompted to check our messages or brush our teeth. But once you understand how our actions can be influenced by certain stimuli, you can learn how to manipulate your cues to implement better habits.

For instance, Anne Thorndike, a primary care physician at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, believed she could improve the eating habits of thousands of hospital staff and visitors simply by manipulating their environment. She decided to replace soda with bottled water in the refrigerators next to the cash register. But she didn't stop there, she added bottled water to every drinking station across the cafeteria. Over three months, the number of bottled water sold increased by 25.8 percent, while soda sales dropped by 11.4 percent. By making simple adjustments, people made healthier choices because the cue to drink water was more prevalent than soda.

You see, the most powerful sensory ability in humans is our vision. The human body contains almost eleven million sensory receptors and almost ten million are dedicated to sight alone. In other words, visual cues are among the highest motivation for behaviors. Therefore, a small change in what we *see* can lead to a big change in what we *do*. Luckily, we can design our environment to our advantage. But how?

Let's say you want to create a habit of practicing guitar. You'll be far less likely to practice if you keep your guitar locked away in a box in your closet. Instead, you should place your guitar somewhere easily seen, like the middle of a room. If you want to eat healthier, place snacks on the counter in plain sight instead of hiding somewhere in the pantry. Want to workout more? Simply put your workout clothes and sneakers out the night before so when you wake up, you can see them!

Creating visual cues can bring attention to your desired habit. Additionally, you can create desired cues by practicing implementation intentions. This simply means that you make a plan beforehand of when, where, and how you are going to accomplish something. When you create a plan, you are more likely to stick with your habits. For instance, a study of voters in the United States found that citizens who were asked “At what time will you vote?” and “How will you get to the voting station?” were far more likely to turn up and vote versus those who were simply asked if they would vote.

So instead of telling yourself that you are going to exercise more often, set a plan and say, “On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday I’m going to go to spin class after work,” and then pack a bag with you to bring for work and leave it in the front seat of your car so it stays in plain sight!

Make It Attractive

Every day we are bombarded with advertisements aimed at making clothing, food, home goods, anything more attractive. Society is filled with highly doctored versions of reality as we engineer our photographs with ideal lighting, photoshopped edits, and exaggerated features to make products more appealing and attractive to consumers. The same can be applied to our habits. The more attractive something is, the more likely we are going to adopt it as a habit.

You see, when we do something pleasurable like eat food or have sex, our brains release a hormone called dopamine, which makes us feel good. But we don't have to actually do those activities, our brains release dopamine when we anticipate those pleasurable activities as well. This is simply our brain encouraging us to partake in a certain activity and rewarding us by feeling good. Remember feeling the excitement of Christmas morning as a child? That's because children anticipate the receiving of gifts and the visiting of Santa, their brains release dopamine that associates Christmas with feeling good.

Of course, some activities that make us feel good aren't necessarily good for us. For instance, people easily become addicted to sex, drugs, and food, all of which make them feel good in the moments leading up to and during the activity. However, these addictions can affect our health and our relationships. That's why it's important to use our knowledge to our advantage when it comes to forming good, healthy habits. If we make a habit of something that we look forward to, then we'll become more likely to follow through.

One way to do this is through temptation bundling. Temptation bundling aims to make habits more attractive, it works when you link an action you *want* to do with an action you *need* to do. For example, Ronan Byrne, an engineering student in Ireland, decided that he needed to exercise more, but he didn't want to exercise more. A problem many of us can relate to.

Something else we can probably relate to is the fact that Ronan enjoyed watching Netflix. His solution? He hacked an exercise bike and connected it to his laptop; however, he didn't want to simply watch Netflix while riding. Instead, he wrote a code that only allowed Netflix to play if he was cycling at a certain speed. In the end, he transformed an activity that he hated and linked it with one that he enjoyed!

While Ronan had the knowledge to hack an exercise bike and write code to help him bundle temptations, you don't need to be an engineer to apply this tip to your own habits. Simply downloading your favorite shows to watch while on the treadmill, or rewarding yourself with a half-hour of Netflix after hitting some work goals are both ways to make your habits more attractive.

Make It Easy

Jerry Uselmann, a professor at the University of Florida, assigned his film photography students a project to be submitted at the end of the semester. To begin, he divided the students into two groups. The first group was told their grade was dependent on the *quantity* of photos they submitted. For instance, one hundred photos earned an A, ninety photos a B, eighty a C, and so on. The second group, however, would be graded on the *quality* of just one photo. Which group do you think earned the better grade at the end of the semester? The *quantity* group. But why? You see, the quantity group was able to hone their skills in the process of creating hundreds of photos whereas the quality group spent their time making just one photo perfect.

This concept can be applied to our habits as well. Often, people are too focused on figuring out the best approach so they never take action. They may research, plan, and strategize, but never act on the habits they wish to create. Therefore, the key to mastering any habit is to stop worrying over how long it'll take to form a new habit, instead, make it easy and simply do it.

As humans, many of us are motivated to do what is easy. The more energy a habit requires, the less likely we are to repeat it. Of course, making a hard habit easy might seem impossible, but there are many tips and tricks to make even the most difficult habits easy! For instance, the habit of sending cards for celebrations, birthdays, condolences, etc. is a nice habit to have, but the effort of going out to the store, picking one out, writing a message, and finally sending it out creates friction and makes us less likely to do it. However, the author's wife has created a hack to make a habit of sending cards a bit easier. By buying cards in bulk and storing them in the house, the author and his wife are far more likely to follow through with sending cards. They made the process easy, no longer do they have to go through the effort of going to the store to buy cards.

You can use this tool to stop bad habits as well. The best way to break a bad habit is to make it impractical to do. For instance, if you want to break the habit of watching TV when you come home from work, then unplug the television and take out the batteries to the remote. You'll be far less likely to go through the effort of turning on the TV and spend your time forming a new, healthier habit.

Another way to make habit-forming easy is through the two-minute rule. The basis of the rule is to start small and make the habit easy to start. For instance, instead of telling yourself that you need to study for a class, you can start with the basics and tell yourself to "open my notes." Or maybe you want to make a habit of doing some yoga after work. Instead of saying, "I need to do thirty minutes of yoga," tell yourself, "Take out my yoga mat." By breaking down the habit into simple steps, you make the habit easier to form which means you'll be more likely to form long-term habits.

Make It Satisfying

The last step to making a long-term habit is to make it satisfying. Successful companies understand this concept and use it to their advantage. For example, toothpaste manufacturers saw great success when they added mint to their products. Mint allowed people to enjoy the act of brushing their teeth because it led to a satisfying, minty fresh feeling. If an experience isn't satisfying, it may not be repeated again.

In the 1990s, Stephen Luby worked in a neighborhood in Karachi, Pakistan as a public health researcher. During his time there, Luby achieved a 52 percent reduction in diarrhea among the local children. In addition, pneumonia rates dropped by 48 percent and skin infections by 35 percent. How did he achieve this? By introducing good soap.

If you grew up in a westernized society, then you understand the importance of handwashing as a basic hygiene skill. Of course, the locals of the Pakistani neighborhood understood this as well, but they failed to create a healthy habit of washing hands. Luby recognized the need for a good soap to make the act of handwashing a satisfying experience, so he partnered with Procter and Gamble to introduce a premium soap to the neighborhood. Seemingly overnight, handwashing became satisfying! The new soap lathered well and smelled nice, people now enjoyed the pleasurable experience and made a habit of washing their hands.

While washing our hands or brushing our teeth brings immediate satisfaction, many other habits don't. This is called a delayed reward environment. For instance, we go to work every day, but the reward of receiving a paycheck might not come until the end of the month. Similarly, you may start going to the gym every morning, but you won't see the rewards of weight loss and toned muscles until weeks or even months later.

On the other hand, habits that result in immediate satisfaction might see delayed consequences. This is why people still smoke when they know the

risks could cost them their lives. The consequence of cancer might not come until twenty years later, but at the moment, it relieves stress and satisfies that nicotine craving. Because of these delayed consequences and delayed rewards, it's important to attach immediate gratification to habits that you wish to pursue.

For example, the author tells about his friends who wanted to kick the habit of going out to eat so they could get healthier and save more money. To do so, they opened a savings account they named "Trip to Europe," and every time they avoided a meal out, they transferred \$50 to the account. Seeing the money go into their savings created a sense of immediate gratification, so it encouraged them to keep up the habit. They made their habit satisfying, and eventually, they saw long-term rewards when they saved enough money to book their trip.

The Importance of Habit Tracking

Kicking a bad habit or implementing a good one can be hard. While it's satisfying to make progress, sometimes that satisfaction is delayed, causing us to give up on those healthy habits. Additionally, we crave visual evidence of progress which we don't always see when kicking habits like smoking. Luckily, there are ways to measure your progress visually by implementing habit tracking.

Habit tracking is a simple but effective technique to ensure that you are staying on track. This technique is nothing new, however. In fact, Benjamin Franklin successfully tracked his habits, who, at the age of twenty started carrying around a booklet everywhere he went. In his booklet, Franklin recorded each time he adhered to his thirteen personal virtues. His virtues consisted of activities to avoid, like frivolous conversations, but also included things he should do each day like always do something useful. Each night, Franklin would record his successes, making a visual diary of his healthy habits.

The most simple technique is to use a calendar to cross off when you complete your desired daily habits. When you track your habits through a calendar or a diary, you will find that you are more likely to adhere to those habits. Tracking is not only obvious and creates a visual measure of your progress, but it's also an attractive, satisfying habit. At the end of the day when you've accomplished whatever it is you aimed to accomplish, you'll feel a sense of anticipation in the action of crossing off each day. Research has also shown that most people who track their progress on goals like weight loss, lowering blood pressure, and quitting smoking are more likely to improve than those who do not.

Additionally, having an accountability partner or implementing a habit contract can change everything. Just as people are more likely to repeat an experience that is satisfying, they are also likely to avoid an experience that is either painful or costly. In other words, behavior changes when there is

an immediate consequence. For instance, university students are more likely to show up to class if attendance affects their grades. The students know the consequences of not showing up, so they do. Similarly, you can apply the same logic to help you form positive habits.

For example, Bryan Harris, an entrepreneur in Nashville, created a habit contract to keep him on task for working out. He had both his wife and personal trainer sign a contract which forced him to commit to getting his weight down to 200 pounds. To reach this goal, Bryan tracked his food intake and committed to weighing himself each week. He then set up penalties for not doing these things. For instance, if he failed to track his food intake, he would have to pay his trainer \$100 and if he failed to weigh himself, he would have to pay his wife \$500!

Bryan's habit contract worked, not only because he was worried about losing the money, but also because he cared about what his trainer and his wife thought about him. He didn't want to let them down, in fact, knowing that someone is watching you can be enough motivation for success. This is why getting an accountability partner or signing a habit contract works well in implementing healthy habits.

Final Summary

While many people believe that making big changes is the key to success, it's the small things we do each day that have the biggest impact on our lives. Our small daily habits will affect the person we become in the future, so it's critical that we adopt healthy habits to ensure we live long, successful lives. Of course, this is easier said than done as forming new habits can be incredibly difficult. Luckily, there are many tips and tricks to help you implement new habits today. The four laws of habit-forming include making it obvious, attractive, easy, and satisfying. When you can make your habits an attractive, easy, and satisfying experience, you'll be more likely to keep up with them. Additionally, an accountability partner and a habit contract will help you even further when starting new, healthy habits or kicking a bad one.



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