

SPRING CLEAN YOUR HABITS

Contributed by Mandy Enright, MS, RDN, RYT

Habits. We all have them. Some benefit our physical and mental well-being, but some can do the opposite. With a new season upon us, it may be a great time to consider spring cleaning some of our habits to see which are helping or hindering our overall goals.

What is a Habit?

A habit is a learned behavior that becomes automatic over time, and is usually triggered by a certain situation. Habits can be good, bad, or neutral. Habits are not unconscious behaviors, such as breathing or blinking.

Habits can be intentional, learned behaviors or accidents. Most habits we form are intentional goal-directed behaviors. Another way of thinking about a habit is as a 'mental shortcut' for completing a task. Once it becomes a habit, the brain can view multiple steps of a process as one large chunk.

Where Do Bad Habits Come From?

If you consider how easy it is to form a habit, you'll understand how quickly a good habit can turn into a bad one. After a little practice, our brains learn to perform complex tasks with little or no conscious effort. Bad habits are formed easily because they are rapidly reinforced, while good habits tend to require more time to see the reward. Think about it: when you are feeling stressed, that bag of potato chips looks a lot more comforting than a salad. Junk food provides an immediate, tasty pleasure and form of stress release.

Habits That Can Be Good, But Turn Bad

Most good habits start with the best intentions. However, some habits can actually wind up doing more harm than good or take us away from the positive outcome we hope to achieve. Here are a few examples of good habits going bad:

- Replacing your daily glass of wine with a mocktail, but increasing sugar intake with the mocktails.
- Overdoing exercise or not taking rest days.
- Tracking your food and calorie intake to the point it becomes too obsessive or you're not making the most nutritious food choices because you're trying to fit into a certain calorie range for the day.
- Relying on supplements instead of focusing on getting nutrients from whole food sources.

Fresh Start Effect

With springtime here, it's a great time to reassess our habits and seek opportunities for change. By the time April arrives, New Year's Resolutions have faded, and many fall back into those old habits. Spring is the perfect time to reset, declutter your mind, and bring focus back to your goals. Research even supports that spring may be one of the best times to start a new habit or make a change. Attempting to change a behavior around a specific time of day or year increases the chances of success, a phenomenon known as the "fresh start effect." Aren't you more motivated to get outside and do some physical activity when the weather is nice?



Assessing Your Habits with a Habit Scorecard (adapted from *Atomic Habits* by James Clear)

Want to know which habit(s) may need some spring cleaning? Do this Habit Assessment:

STEP 1:

Write down all your daily habits from the time you wake up until you go to bed. Your list may start off looking a little something like this:

- Wake up
- Turn off alarm
- Check my phone
- Go to the bathroom
- Take a shower
- Brush my teeth
- and so on...

STEP 2:

Look at each behavior on your list and determine if it is a positive habit (+), negative habit (-), or neutral habit (=). Make a mark next to each item on your list:

- Wake up =
- Turn off alarm =
- Check my phone -
- Go to the bathroom =
- Take a shower +
- Brush my teeth +

If you're unsure if a habit is positive, negative, or neutral, ask yourself how this particular behavior benefits your long-term goals and greater purpose.

STEP 3:

Now that you have awareness of your habits and behaviors, take some time to notice what is happening when you do each of these. Observe thoughts and actions without judgment. From there, you can start to determine which negative habits may not be serving you and how you can focus on phasing out the negative habits in favor of something more positive. Start by focusing on ONE habit to change - that one change often leads to a domino effect of more positive habits as a result.

Want to dive deep into changing your habits? Contact Wellness Concepts to learn more about our NEW 30-Day Habit Change Challenge. Visit www.well-concepts.com for more info or to request a demo.

What habits will you be re-evaluating this spring?



Mandy Enright MS, RDN, RYT, is a Registered Dietitian, Yoga Instructor, and Corporate Wellness Expert, as well as main content contributor for Wellness Concepts. Mandy is a featured presenter, both virtually and onsite near her home in Neptune, NJ.

