

77

**Good
Habits**



**To Live
A Better
Life**

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77 Good Habits to Live a Better Life

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Are you eager to improve your productivity? Gain more satisfaction from everyday tasks? Want to reach goals, realize dreams and live out aspirations?

This book will help you acquire daily habits that will help you do these things and more.

What Makes a Habit So Powerful?

Daily habits are powerful – perhaps more powerful than you realize.

We tend to place a lot of emphasis on the big decisions in life such as whether or not we get married or where we go to college. These are important; but we tend to discount daily habits, even though those small, seemingly insignificant routines are just as influential.

Consider the following habits...

What you eat for breakfast today may not seem to matter, but what you eat for breakfast every day may determine whether you are obese or slender, healthy or unhealthy. It may determine whether you live to 100 or die of a heart attack at age 50.

How much sleep you get today may not seem to matter, but your overall sleep quality may affect your mental health to the point where it affects your ability to hold a job, advance professionally, interact respectfully with others and even maintain a love relationship with a partner.

Your silence in a meeting at work today may not seem to influence your career path, but a lifetime of hesitancy and self-doubt may cost you hundreds of thousands of dollars in potential income.

Why Focus on Developing Daily Habits?

A habit is a regular tendency or practice. It's something you do almost without thinking. In some cases, our habits even come to define us as people.

You may consider yourself an “early riser,” but really you're just in the habit of getting up early. You may think of your neighbor as a runner, but really she's just in the habit of running.

When we get in the habit of doing something, it no longer takes the tremendous amount of effort a new activity requires. That's why you'll find yourself swinging through the Dunkin' Donuts drive through instead of searching for a healthier breakfast option (familiar is comforting, it requires less thought, it feels right – all because it's a habit.)

Your habits also relate to why you'll put up with unpleasant tasks at work (you're in the habit of just saying yes and it would take more effort to negotiate) or settle for boring instead of seeking adventure.

We're creatures of habit, and the many daily habits we have become accustomed to are the very fabric of our lives.

Healthy Habits? Healthy You!

I've found that creating healthy habits can improve your quality of life significantly. That's why I'm going to share the 77 most powerful positive habits I've found for improving your life.

As you tackle this book, I encourage you to take steps to break these 77 habits into something more manageable.

For your convenience, I've divided the book into five sections, offering positive daily habits for the following aspects of your life:

- Work
- Success
- Sleep
- Learning
- Health

Each of the habits presented in this book is completely doable. Establishing the new habit will not be difficult. Your goal is to focus on the new practice until it replaces your old habits.

That's the beauty of daily habits: they are small enough to be easy, yet the end result of establishing that new habit is exponential in scope.

For optimal results, I suggest you read the entire book through once, and then tackle this book in one of the following ways:

- Commit to establishing new habits in just one area of your life, concentrating on one segment of the book until you feel you have made adequate progress
- Choose one habit at a time until you've got that one habit down, and then add a new habit to your repertoire after that
- Choose your favorite habits out of the 77 habits suggested, and tackle them one by one until you've established all your favorite new habits

Whatever way you choose to approach this challenge, I encourage you to take the

time to enjoy the process. Improving your life is fun. It involves dreaming and assessing, growing and changing.

How do I know?

I'm certainly not perfect.

In fact, I'm still working on establishing some of the habits listed here in this book.

But I do know this: every positive habit I establish is one more step in the right direction, and I can feel the positive impact on my life over all. My wish for you is a similar experience as you enrich your life through the development of positive habits.

Chapter 1: Work Habits That Pay Dividends

According to the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the average employed American works 7.6 hours per workday. Considering the average employed American only spends about 2 hours on housework and somewhere around 5 hours a day on leisure activities, your work day is probably a huge part of your life.

Many of us work more hours than we sleep in a day, and most of us spend far more time working than we spend on any other activity.

Your work experience impacts the rest of your life.

If you have a good day at work, you are more likely to come home refreshed and ready to dive into something engaging at home.

If you come home from work exhausted, frustrated or depressed by your job, you will be less likely to engage in fun activities at home. You might snap at your husband or wife, or be too tired to enjoy the kids. Your friends might call, hoping you'll be free to go out, but you won't have the energy to enjoy the leisure hours of your life.

Your working hours also impact your income potential, your personal satisfaction and your career path.

That's why I've chosen 13 highly effective work habits that can transform your work experience, making you happier and more effective at your workplace.

Habit #1: Arrive Fifteen Minutes Before Necessary

One of the best ways to set yourself up for work success is to get to work before you need to be there.

If you are in the habit of scooting in just before your first meeting, you're probably dealing with at least one of the following:

- Anxiety over how your coworkers perceive you
- Speeding on the way to work
- Inability to smile and greet coworkers pleasantly
- Lack of planning time before you have to dive into actual work
- In a nutshell, unnecessary stress

Perhaps you're one of those rare birds who performs well under stress, but most of us flounder.

Coming to work late or barely on time puts you at risk for:

- A computer that won't start up right away, making you late
- A parking complication or other unforeseen troubles with transportation
- Realizing you didn't finish that report that is due first thing in the morning

If you always arrive early, you will build in a cushion that will protect you from undue stress. It's the best way to arrive at work calm, positive, relaxed and guilt-free.

To establish this habit, you will need to actually leave your house fifteen minutes earlier than you usually do. By doing this, you'll improve your performance and protect your mental health, all the while bolstering your reputation around the office.

Habit #2: Choose One Way to Excel Each Day

It's easy to get bogged down at work, forgetting your end goal. Perhaps you took on a job as a software engineer, and you love programming, but you hate all those meetings you must attend before you actually get to program. It's easy to get discouraged and lose enthusiasm.

When you let one piece of the job drag you down, it affects your overall performance. This can negatively impact your ability to grow your career.

One habit you can cultivate that will combat this negative spiral is this:

Choose one way to excel at your job on a daily basis. Link this one effort to something bigger than the job you already have.

For example, let's say you are a graphic designer. You don't really like the project you're currently on, and the meetings are a drag. However, you hope to start your own graphic design firm someday (or even to just contract on your own, working independently.)

What will you need to get a new job or to land clients when you start your own firm? *A great portfolio, right?*

Choose to excel in your actual graphic design work each day, even if the actual project is boring (like a logo for a plumber), keeping in mind that you can use the project as part of your portfolio if you do a good enough job.

Grit your teeth and get through the meetings required, but pour yourself into the actual design work, creating something you are truly proud of.

Start your day with the daily habit of choosing one piece to excel in, and you'll build something impressive over time, regardless of how wonderful or awful your

current position actually is.

Habit #3: Race Against Yourself

I know how easy it is to get distracted and derailed. You get emails, text messages, and instant messages all day long. You go online to research something for work and some stupid Yahoo article title catches your eye. Perhaps you work from home where you have a laundry list of distractions that call your name all day long.

You can beat the distraction demons by setting small goals for yourself and then racing against the clock to beat your estimated time frame.

Make a habit of setting a goal regarding how much you want to get done each day. **Then divide the work into small segments anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour's worth of work at a time.** Then set a timer for yourself and race against yourself to see if you really can achieve your goals.

By working in short bursts and setting small goals, you'll find your productivity will far exceed whatever you'd meander through if you proceed without deadlines or goals.

Habit #4: Incorporate Stress Management Into Your Work Day

Do you work in a stressful environment?

A recent Pew Research Center Survey reported that 26 percent of women and 21 percent of men surveyed reported "always feeling rushed." Stress inhibits our ability to think clearly, negotiate well and get along with coworkers.

That's why you'll want to incorporate a simple form of stress management into your workday.

One highly effective way to manage stress is to breathe deeply for five minutes.

When a meeting is getting stressful or a day feels harried, excuse yourself to your office, cubicle, restroom or car. Then close your eyes and focus on nothing but your breathing. Set a timer for five minutes and refuse to think about anything else besides how marvelous it feels to breathe in and out.

Habit #5: Network

Whether you love your current job or hate it, networking is always a wise move.

Why?

It's close to impossible to know what your work situation will be five years from now, even if you're in a stable field, and knowing someone who knows someone is the best way to get a new job or line up a new client.

A recent CNN report tells us only 15-20 percent of available jobs are advertised. That means somewhere between 80-85 percent of jobs are being filled by personal relationships.

How do establish a habit of networking?

First off, always bring business cards with you wherever you go, and hand them out freely. Be sure to keep up with contacts from time to time, connecting on social networks like LinkedIn so you have a way to get back in touch later on.

Habit #6: Play to Your Strengths

We all have strengths and weaknesses.

For example, I love to research, plan and write, but I'm not so keen on accounting. That's why I hire an accountant to handle my taxes and a personal assistant to handle my paperwork.

You also have strengths and weaknesses.

If you make a habit of using your strengths but delegating your weaknesses to someone else, you will excel in your career.

This is easier to do if you run your own business than if you work a 9-5 job for the man, but you really can make this shift in most work environments.

Collaborate with coworkers on projects or talk to your manager about taking on more work that suits your strengths and shifting assignments that trip you up to someone who is more competent in that area. If your boss is unyielding, look for a new position somewhere that will allow you to use your strengths.

Habit #7: Take a Real Lunch Break

If you've been eating at your desk, you're cheating yourself—and you coworkers.

A recent survey conducted by *LinkedIn* and *Right Management* concluded that 20 percent of Americans eat at their desks while working and 13 percent don't take any kind of break for lunch.

Work study experts conclude that taking a real lunch break will improve your productivity and prevent job burnout. **That means you should at least leave**

your desk and enjoy a meal where you're not engaged in work activities.

Better yet, walk to a nearby lunch destination. Even if you just walk two blocks to a local restaurant and walk back again, this will help you manage work stress. Moving your body, getting outside in the sun, and getting out of the office all works together to relieve stress and rejuvenate your spirit.

Habit #8: Always Look for Intrinsic Rewards

You might have a really boring job right now. If this is the case, you can either let the job rot your brain out, or you can take control of your destiny. **One way you can do this is to daily find an intrinsic reward that has been hidden inside your work.**

What does this mean practically?

Each day you need to find one thing that makes you feel good about doing your job. Maybe it's knowing you helped someone figure out how to use their bank account or that you felt fabulous about getting through that huge stack of mortgage papers that needed to get evaluated and processed.

Look for rewards that truly make you proud of yourself. Then write down your one accomplishment each day. Believe it or not, this will help you avoid burnout at your job.

Habit #9: Add a "Wake Up" Routine in the Afternoon

Perk up in the afternoon (your body automatically enters an energy slump somewhere between one and three every afternoon) by using a natural stimulant.

A lot of people enjoy caffeine in its various forms, but some people find an afternoon cup of coffee or soda will interfere with sleep at night. Try the following and see which you can build into your daily afternoon routine:

- Put a drop of peppermint essential oil under your nose (you will feel more mentally alert).
- Drink a cup of yerba mate tea (this tea contains a mellow stimulant that acts like caffeine but will not make you jittery or interfere with sleep).
- Do jumping jacks or run in place for three minutes.
- Stretch for three minutes (sun salutations are perfect, but any stretch will do).

By incorporating an invigorating practice into your afternoon routine, you will be more productive and enthusiastic at a time of day when you might otherwise be sleepy and unmotivated.

Habit #10: Sandbag When Estimating

It's important to be known at work as reliable and dependable. That's why you should **get in the habit of sandbagging**, which means padding any estimate on time, money or resources needed to complete a project.

It's tempting to say you can get a job quickly, but it's better to prepare for obstacles. People who routinely come in under budget and on time are going to be trusted and respected more than the people who give optimistic projections and then fall short.

Make it a habit to ask for more time, money and resources than you think you will need.

Habit #11: Make Yourself Known

You probably don't have problems doing this if you are an extrovert, but many introverts find themselves quietly doing their duties—and then being passed over at bonus time.

Make it a habit to speak up at least once in every meeting.

Instead of zoning out in meetings and biding your time until you can get to the “real work,” look for ways to add insight and value in a vocal way.

This is especially important if you work remotely. If people don't know who you are and what you contribute, you will be the first one on the chopping block when it comes time for layoffs.

If you happen to be a talker, you may wish to scale back how much you contribute, focusing instead on contributing only valuable input. You don't want to be known as a boorish person who monopolizes meetings. Instead you need to stand out for useful, helpful contributions.

Habit #12: Document Everything Important

While you'd like to believe your manager, coworkers and clients will always remember agreements and negotiations the same way you remember them, it's very likely you will encounter disagreements at one point or another.

To keep communication clear and to prevent misunderstandings, you will want to make a habit of documenting the following:

- Project specifications and deadlines
- Any discussion of pay rates, raises or bonuses
- Expectations expressed in meetings
- Customer or client issues
- Problems with coworkers

Get everything in writing. You can do this by documenting through an email or notes on your computer. If you are documenting sensitive information, password protect your document so coworkers can't possibly get access to it without your permission.

Then, if someone later remembers a bonus discussion differently than you do, you can check that email or note to yourself and bring the documentation to the table for discussion.

Habit #13: Avoid Gossiping

Does your coworker drive you batty?

If it hasn't happened to you yet, it probably will someday. It's tempting to gossip with your friends about "Loud Larry" or "Mustache Mary," but you'd better think before you start sharing such thoughts with anyone even vaguely related to your career.

It's best to assume that you will have to work with this person again someday, and the next time around, Loud Larry might be your boss. Mustache Mary might be on the review board evaluating your resume for a new position.

Treat coworkers with respect and keep personal grudges out of the work arena altogether.

Habit #14: Find a Way to Laugh

Work-related stress can do more than get you down. It can also interfere with progress and cooperation in the workplace.

One of the best ways to diffuse stress and restore morale is through laughter.

In fact, corporate human resource divisions are beginning to recognize the value of programs like laughter therapy, laughter yoga classes and laughter clubs.

Scientists like Charles Schaefer, psychology professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University, have discovered that even forced laughter can cause physiological changes that help people feel better.

Your company may not be ready to hold laughter yoga sessions, but you can lighten the mood during meetings and improve overall morale by getting in touch with your internal stand up comedian. Crack a joke when appropriate, and let it rip with a couple close coworkers over lunch. A good laugh will help you work better and live better.

Habit #15: Ask For What You Need

Have you complained to your friends about something at work? Perhaps you're sick of the snarky way your coworker talks to you, or you feel there's never enough time to complete projects?

These complaints, if gone unrecognized, are exactly the sorts of things that end up decreasing work productivity and later resulting in termination or you deciding the job isn't worth it. In fact, a study published in Forbes lists lack of respect and lack of work-life balance as two of the top five reasons people quit their jobs.

Talk to management about complaints, explaining exactly what you need and why you need it. You'll be surprised at how willing most companies are to provide exactly what you need – if you ask clearly and directly, without accusing anyone of wrong doing.

Silently holding onto resentment about unmet (and often unexpressed) needs will often build to the point where you will feel the need to quit. That's why it's better to ask to be moved to a new group or express your need for more time to finish projects than to just silently seethe at your desk.

Habit #16: Leverage the 80/20 Rule

You've heard the theory that most people get 80 percent of the work done in 20 percent of the time they spend on a project, haven't you?

That's because we're not designed to work at full efficiency at all times. We have productive times of day and unproductive times, productive environments and unproductive environments.

The key is this: **Make sure you are working on the most important projects during your most productive space of each day.**

What does that mean practically?

Early birds like me should prioritize our most important work for the early morning, leaving less important work for the afternoon. Those who peak in solitude should save their most important work for times when they work alone.

Those who work best as a group should schedule important tasks to be tackled with coworkers.

That may mean you have to alter your schedule or talk to your manager. Maybe you want to come into work an hour early or stay after everyone else leaves at night. Maybe you'll want to ask if you can work from home one day a week or collaborate with coworkers on specific projects.

Find your sweet spot, and then make sure you're tackling the most important tasks in the best way and time.

Chapter 2: Success Habits

What is your record for meeting goals that you set? Do you often fall short of the goal? Do you start out excited but lose interest quickly?

The following are simple daily habits that will help you succeed.

Habit #17: Find Your Passion

Too often we take on goals because someone else thinks we should be a certain way.

Maybe your husband thinks you should be skinnier or your coworker talked you into signing up for a triathlon. Your boss might have coerced you into agreeing to aim for a certain level of sales or productivity, or perhaps you feel pressured by society in general to set a specific goal.

The key to success is to tap into your genuine, internal passion. That means you need to identify goals that truly inspire and excite you, goals that come from within.

If someone else has set a goal for you and you don't have the authentic desire to achieve it (let's say your parents say you must get A's in college or they won't pay your way), you need to get in touch with something authentic that will motivate you. Perhaps your fear of living in poverty could inspire you, or your desire to graduate without student loan debt.

Habit one to success is to daily remind yourself of that genuine passion that will fuel your fire.

Habit #18: Aim High

Do you want to lose ten pounds? Then set your goal for fifteen.

Do you want to make \$100,000 a year? Set your goal for \$110,000.

Most of us have trouble seeing a goal through from start to finish. That's why it's wise to **shoot for something higher than you actually need to achieve**. Then, if you lose steam three-quarters of the way to the goal, you will still have achieved enough to be satisfied.

Habit #19: Get Specific with Goal-Setting

People who are in the habit of setting vague goals (like "I want to lose weight") are far less likely to succeed in meeting those goals than people who set specific

goals (like “I want to lose twenty pounds.”)

Become a person who refuses to accept a vague goal as a real goal. Instead, force yourself to think through the details and to get specific. Write down those specific goals and keep them somewhere you can see them every day.

Habit #20: Set Small, Attainable Goals

After you’ve gotten specific about your overarching goal, you’ll want to break it down into small, achievable goals that will lead up to completing the end goal.

These goals should be practical things that can be done every single day and can, in and of themselves, become habits.

For example, let’s say you want to lose twenty pounds. You will then need to research weight loss and come up with a weekly goal, let’s say one pound per week. You will then need to schedule out what you will do each day to achieve this goal.

Will you log your calorie consumption on an online calorie counter? Will you check in with a weight loss buddy every day about menu choices? Will you perform some sort of exercise each day? If so, what kind of exercise will you perform each day that week?

Plan out small, reasonable actions you can take. Then check them off as you finish them. Prepare for off days, when you won’t be able to meet your goal for the day, and accommodate for that by planning more effort on other days.

If you get in the habit of taking specific action, you will be far more likely to achieve your goals.

Habit #21: Address Your Weaknesses

Most of us have at least one weakness that we’d really like to change. Perhaps you are afraid of public speaking or can’t figure out how to dress professionally, and as a result, you are insecure in a professional environment.

Instead of avoiding public speaking or settling for an unprofessional job, **challenge yourself to tackle your weakness head on.**

Join a *Toastmasters* group or a public speaking *Meetup*. Hire a stylist to help you learn how to shop, dress and style your hair professionally. Invest upfront in overcoming weaknesses that undermine your self confidence and you will set yourself for a more successful life overall.

Habit #22: Laugh at Your Mistakes

What is your first reaction when you've realized you've made a minor mistake?

If it's to laugh at yourself, you're on the right track.

If you take yourself too seriously, you will be more likely to get discouraged and give up. It's important to let mistakes and failures roll off your back so you can get back on the proverbial horse again.

Make it a habit to laugh – even if it's forced laughter – at yourself when you blow it.

By refusing to get down, you'll find the strength to persevere until you've met your goal.

Habit #23: Enjoy the Journey

I know I've been tempted to think I'll be so much happier once I've met a goal, only to later discover that really, my life is only marginally improved. Wait a couple months after achieving the goal, and in most cases, you won't feel all that much happier than you were before you tackled the goal.

That's because we adjust emotionally to whatever our current conditions are. The real satisfaction occurs while we are mid-pursuit of a goal or dream.

Why?

The challenge and all those mini successes along the way are more exciting than the end result when we finally "arrive." While pursuing a new goal, we usually learn a lot, meet new people, figure out that we are capable of more than we previously knew and experience a lot of drama, both good and bad.

Become a person who daily reminds yourself to enjoy the journey. You'll be happier and more likely to see the journey to the actual destination.

Habit #24: Find Accountability Partners

Accountability is one of the most powerful tools for meeting goals. When someone else knows what your goals are and is willing to hold you accountable, you will find the strength to follow through in situations when you might have compromised or made excuses.

That's why you will benefit if you formally commit to a support/accountability system. You might want to join an online forum, start attending a support group like Alcoholics Anonymous, hire a life coach or

make an agreement with a friend who will just as committed to your success as you are.

Once you get your support system set up, establish a habit of checking in with your accountability system daily. That may mean posting a quick report online as to whether or not you took a scheduled step towards your goal or talking to your support friend.

Daily accountability will help you succeed.

Habit #25: Track Your Progress

If you want to succeed, you'll need to **keep track of your daily progress in a concrete fashion**. Set tangible goals such as:

- I will write 500 words every day (If you want to write a book)
- I will exercise five days a week (if you want to get in shape)
- I will devote the first thirty minutes of my day to building my online business
- I will pack my own lunch of healthy foods every day (if you want to improve your health)

Make a chart or spreadsheet of these mini goals and then mark off how well you fulfill your commitments each day. If you get in the habit of tracking your progress, you will find success is that much easier to achieve.

Habit #26: Make Your Goals Public Knowledge

We're naturally predisposed to want to look good. That's why going public with goals (and success or failure to take steps to meet goals) works so well.

Go public with your goal, stating your plan on a public forum such as your work place, a group of friends, an online forum or a support group.

Some people find posting on a blog helps them since the audience of the entire internet can be quite convincing. After all, you don't want to publically fail, right?

Make it habit to post details of your progress in one public arena, even if it's on a forum under a screen name. You'll be amazed at how much you'll want to have good news to post each day, even if the people witnessing your journey don't know your real name.

Habit #27: Follow an Established Path

Once you've determined what your goal is, you need to find someone or something to follow. That someone could be an expert in the field, an excellent training book, a training class or an idol who will inspire you.

If you try to reinvent the wheel by yourself, you'll end up making mistakes or hitting roadblocks you could have avoided.

Find a book, online program or mentor and craft your plan to success off that example. This will also help you believe it can be done – after all, you're just following in the footsteps of someone who has already succeeded!

Habit #28: Take Risks

If you want to grow, you have to take risks.

This is simply the nature of our being. When stretched, we find out we can do so much more than we imagined we could, but when we are not challenged, we don't usually push ourselves enough to find out what we could achieve.

You can apply this basic principle to your goal-seeking efforts. Make a habit of taking on the bigger of two challenges when presented options.

For example, let's say you want to train for a marathon. Your friend stops by for a run and gives you the option: Do you want to try to push for extra miles today, or do you want to go for an easy run. Unless you think you'll risk an injury, the wise answer is to go for the extra miles, especially since you might not push yourself as much later in the week when working out on your own.

Likewise, take on work challenges, creative challenges and interpersonal opportunities when they arise. This will get you in the habit of testing your limits.

Habit #29: Set High Stakes and Rewards

Are you at a point where you realize you're not really motivated to succeed? Then you need an effective stick and carrot system in place.

You can set stakes high by:

- Accepting a bet (monetary investment)
- Going public with your commitment (blog, pool with coworkers, support group)
- Signing up for a commitment that will require you have achieved at least some success (signing up for a race)

Ask yourself what would really matter to you, and then use that as motivation to force you to meet your goal.

Habit #30: Focus on One Area at a Time

One of the biggest mistakes people make is to take on more than one goal at a time.

We all want to believe we can improve everything in our lives at once, but you've got to realize this truth: you have these bad habits or have not achieved these goals for a reason. They are probably very hard for you to achieve or you'd have already accomplished them all!

That's why you need to make it a habit to never take on more than you can tackle at once.

If you want to write a screen play, then you probably will need to stop putting in extra hours at your job, cut down on socializing and invest emotional and mental energy in thinking about the play. If you want to quit smoking, you probably shouldn't try to lose weight at the same time.

Commit to one goal for an extended period of time, and make sure all other goals are secondary or nonexistent for the time being.

Give yourself self grace in the other areas and focus all of your attention on improving in this one, specific area.

Habit #31: Don't Over-Commit

Have you ever noticed that your good intentions to work on your goal are often derailed by other people?

For example, you might have planned to devote eight hours to your new affiliate marketing business this week. Perhaps you promised yourself you would write and post six new blog posts and outline that email campaign you planned on launching.

However, you were asked by your sister if you could watch her kids one night, and then your boss told you that you "really should attend" a happy hour or dinner with your coworkers who are in from out of town for the week. Your work out buddy begged you to please run a race with him on Saturday, and your daughter asked for a roller skating sleepover party.

Before you know it, all eight hours of your time have vanished into thin air.

How can you avoid this?

Develop the habit of asking for time to “think it over” before committing.

You can use the line, “Let me check my calendar and get back to you.” Then make yourself wait at least 24 hours before responding to requests.

You may find that your sister finds someone else to watch her kids and a bunch of your coworkers decline the happy hour invitation, making it more acceptable for you to also say no. Your work out buddy may be fine doing the race with or without you, and your daughter might get invited to someone else’s house – freeing you up even more.

Habit #32: Collect Inspiring “Totems”

Not sure what a totem is? A totem is a physical item that reminds you of something important. It could be something as small as a lucky coin or as big as a statue.

Have you ever noticed that some people collect things that inspire them? That’s exactly what you’ll want to do. **Collect physical items that remind you of your goal and will inspire you to persevere.**

For example, if your goal is to run a marathon, you might want to collect things like a shoe keychain, medals and t-shirts from races you’ve run, inspirational posters, a pebble you retrieved from your shoe on a particularly good run, etc.

Keep these totems where you can see them often. They’ll keep you focused on your goal.

Chapter 3: Sleep Habits

Believe it or not, not everyone needs the much-prescribed eight hours of sleep everyone talks about. In fact, sleep needs range from a mere five and a half to a mighty ten hours per night.

That means you need to figure out how much sleep you need, and then figure out how to get it.

The following habits will help you get your much-needed sleep, which will help you function better in the rest of your life.

Habit #33: Plan for Adequate Sleep

First off, find out how much sleep you need for optimal functionality. You will want to set aside a week for this experiment, allowing yourself to go to bed whenever feels natural and then wake up whenever feels natural. Record your number of hours of sleep you got each night, and make note of how you felt each day afterward.

For those first couple nights, you may be catching up on sleep if you were sleep-deprived, but you should settle into a regular routine by the end of the week.

Now that you know how much sleep you actually need, you will need to block out that much time plus one hour each night.

Why the extra hour? Because you'll want to start incorporating the habits listed below into that hour just before you actually turn out the lights.

Schedule your sleep time as if it were an appointment, and treat it as such.

After all, it's an appointment with restoration and rejuvenation, something we all need!

Habit #34: Reserve the Bedroom for Sleep-Related Activities

Many of us use our bedrooms as an extra living room or craft room. Maybe you head to the bedroom right after dinner to settle in for a board game with your child or to watch TV with your partner.

If you've been using your bedroom as a living room, you'll probably want to move those evening activities to another part of the house.

Why?

Making a psychological separation between your bedroom (where you sleep) and activity rooms (kitchen, TV room, office) will help you associate your bedroom with sleeping. This will help you leave your anxieties from work and bill-related worries in the office, electronic stimulation in the TV room and stress of household chores in the kitchen.

Many people find that making this distinction frees them up for much sounder sleep.

Habit #35: Don't Exercise Right Before Bedtime

If you can't exercise before work or over your lunch break, you will want to exercise right after work, ending your exercise session at least two hours before you plan on retiring for the evening.

Why?

Your body will remain revved up and energized for about two hours after you exercise (especially if you exercise vigorously), making it hard for you to fall asleep.

However, a vigorous workout, followed up by a bath or shower and two hours of relaxation time, will result in sound, peaceful sleep that will both nourish you and help your body recuperate.

Habit #36: Stop Using Electronics Right Before Bedtime

Internet surfers, gamers and television junkies be warned! All that time spent on electronics can get you so jazzed up inside that you can't sleep well. The visual stimulation you experience when using electronics creates a buzz inside your head that lingers, interfering with sleep.

What should you do for that last hour before bed? Try reading, journaling or making a puzzle instead.

All of these recommended activities are calming and will help you fall asleep easier.

Habit #37: Drink the Right "Sleepy Time" Drink

That glass of wine might make you feel sleepy, but cut yourself off after one glass or you'll actually sleep less soundly than if you abstained altogether.

Looking for the best sleepy time beverages? Valerian or chamomile tea work

wonders, as does the infamous warm milk. Some people can handle caffeine even right before bed, but most people need to stop drinking caffeine around four in the afternoon if they want to sleep soundly.

That means you need to avoid coffee, hot chocolate, and even decaffeinated green or black tea – they still contain traces of caffeine. Go for herbal teas instead.

Habit #38: Purge All Anxious Thoughts

Most of us encounter some sort of stress each day. It might be positive stress (you're in love, you finished a big project at work) or it might be negative stress (you missed a deadline at work, your neighbor snarked at you about the dog barking, you found out your son has a D in Social Studies.)

Perhaps you are worried about potential problems (what if your daughter doesn't catch the bus tomorrow and you end up late for that client meeting because you have to drive her to school; what if your boyfriend didn't text back because he's thinking about breaking up.)

Whatever the case may be, most of us end the day with a stockpile of emotions and thoughts raging through our heads. We need a way to empty out all those thoughts, put them into perspective and then lock them away for the night so we can get some decent shut eye.

That's why you'll want to make a habit of purging all anxious thoughts at least an hour before you go to bed.

The following are very effective purging practices:

- Talk to a friend
- Write in a journal
- Participate in an online advice forum
- Write your concerns on *Post It* notes and then put them in a drawer
- Plan out your next day to avoid surprises and to help yourself feel in control

After you've dumped out your concerns, you'll want to relax for that last remaining hour, doing something that distracts you from anxiety and helps you settle into a content feeling of "everything will be okay."

Habit #39: Meditate or Pray for Ten Minutes

Set a timer, shut your eyes, sit in a comfortable position and surrender your worries to a higher being.

Even if you're not religious, ten minutes of meditation (repeating a mantra or focusing on your breathing) will help you relax enough to sleep soundly.

Habit #40: Engage in a Flow Activity

“Flow” activities are repetitive activities that you can do without concentrating. Psychologists have found that such activities calm your nervous system and will help you feel content, grounded and secure – all of which will help you sleep better.

Make it a habit to daily engage in a flow activity such as the following: painting, knitting, woodworking, cleaning or folding laundry.

Relax into the activity and allow your mind to wander wherever it may. You will subconsciously deal with stress from the day, explore creative ideas, and end the flow activity feeling more relaxed. You'll sleep better because of it.

Habit #41: Adjust the Lights

Replace bright light bulbs with softer light in your bedroom, signaling to your body that it is time to go to sleep.

We were designed to be light sensitive so we would wake with the morning sun and go to bed soon after the sun set. Use low wattage, golden light bulbs (never those harsh white florescent bulbs) in your bedroom. Better yet, light candles. You'll be sleepy before you know it!

Habit #42: Turn Up the Music

Of course, I'm not talking about rock or screaming heavy metal music. Calming sound cues help us relax. Scientists believe this is linked to the constant sounds we heard while in the womb, lulling us to sleep.

As adults, calming musical rhythms such as the sound of waves, wind, rain or soothing music signals to our body that it's time to sleep.

Habit #43: Turn Down the Room Temperature

Even if you like to be warm, you'll sleep better in a cool room. This is because your body's core temperature lowers as you go to sleep, rising when it gets closer to your time to wake back up.

Lower the thermostat by a couple degrees and pile on the blankets.

The combination of cool room temperature and snuggly, heavy blankets on you will make you feel warm, cozy and secure – the perfect combination for a perfect night of sleep.

Habit #44: Cover All Sources of Light

Ever get the feeling there are a dozen eyes staring at you as you lie in bed?

Those would be the many LED lights you have in your room. **Cover LED lights or block them from your view.**

Most people sleep best in complete darkness, so you'll want to move computers and extra electronics out of the bedroom so you can make it as dark as possible.

Habit #45: Indulge a Calming Experience

Take a hot bath, give your partner a massage (and then receive one), engage in sex or stretch your muscles for a good 20-30 minutes in that hour before you go to sleep.

All of these activities involve your senses and promote genuine relaxation.

Habit #46: Sniff Deeply

Your massage therapist isn't using lavender essential oil just because he likes floral scents. Scientific tests have proven that lavender and geranium scents (essential oils, not artificial synthetic scents) lower blood pressure and slow your heart rate.

Invest in an essential oil diffuser for your bedroom and diffuse a couple drops of a calming essential oil each night right before bed for a peaceful night of sleep.

Habit #47: Get Help with Your Sleep

Does your partner like to stay up later than you? **Ask him or her to cuddle with you for five minutes, even if he or she is going to get back up again.** Why? Cuddling helps lower our blood pressure and heart rates, and it helps us feel secure so we can drift off to sleep.

We are designed to want to have something living close to us when we fall asleep. That's why cuddling with a child, pet or partner will all help you fall asleep. Listen to your snuggle buddy's breathing and pay attention to how good it feels to have a warm body up against you. You'll be out in no time.

Habit #48: Knock Yourself Out

If you've tried all of the habits mentioned above and still can't sleep, you'll want to **try taking melatonin**, a natural supplement that your body already produces. Melatonin works in conjunction with light exposure. Our body produces melatonin each night after the sun sets, signaling to our body that its time to rest.

Many over the counter sleep aids are simply decongestants repackaged, and most of them leave you groggy the next morning. You can take three to five milligrams of melatonin right before bed and still feel great in the morning.

Melatonin is non-habit-forming, but it's a fine habit to establish if you need help falling asleep but don't want to be foggy-headed the next morning.

Chapter 4: Learning Habits

In this chapter, I'm going to share the top habits that have helped me with studying, reading and learning in general.

Whether you are reading nonfiction books to educate yourself on a specific topic (say investments or internet marketing) or are studying for an exam, there are several daily habits that will exponentially increase your ability to absorb and later recall material.

Employ these habits to supercharge your learning potential.

Habit #49: Speed Read First, Then Re-read for Details

My natural tendency is to try to absorb all of the details of reading material in one pass, but the best way to learn complex information is to break down your reading session into two or three passes.

First, skim through a section of reading material (one to two pages is best), reading superficially. Don't stress about remembering anything this first pass through.

Now go back through the reading material, reading slowly. Pronounce difficult words out loud. Underline vocabulary words or key concepts.

If you still feel befuddled, go through the material a third time. You'll be amazed at how much information sticks in your head!

Habit #50: Take Notes

When exposed to new material (by lecture, webinar, reading material), take notes. **Jot down key words and concepts and references to outside resources that might enhance your learning experience.**

After some time has passed, rewrite your notes, summarizing and compiling information into a study notebook. You'll find that you probably jotted down partial information or material that struck you as important while you listened to the lecture, but doesn't strike you as being so interesting or relevant now.

Follow up on concepts you took notes on, but didn't explain clearly to yourself when jotting down your thoughts. Look up definitions of key words and outside resources. Write down the information you discover in a way that makes sense to you. This will cement the information in your memory.

Habit #51: Teach Someone Else

We learn best when we teach others. That's why study groups can be so effective, if used correctly. Instead of using your study group just to get assignments done, ask a study partner to quiz you on material, forcing you to verbally summarize what you've learned. **Find a person who is doing poorly in the class and become an informal tutor.**

If you can't find someone to instruct, tell your partner or roommate all about things you've learned in class. Don't just repeat the stuff you already know well.

Choose information you're having trouble digesting and make yourself explain it to someone while eating dinner or walking the dog. This will ensure you've really made sense of the material you've been learning.

Habit #52: Talk to Yourself

Believe it or not, hearing your own voice will help you memorize new facts. **Record yourself reading vocabulary words and definitions aloud, and then replay it for yourself later.** This trick will make solo study sessions more effective. You'll be using several senses at once – audio, verbal and visual – plus you'll be more alert and awake, since reading aloud requires concentration.

One fun trick is to fashion a PVC pipe "phone" to direct sound to your ear as you read aloud. Believe it or not, the concentrated sound of your own voice coming through that pipe phone will be easier to remember than if you simply read material aloud.

Habit #53: Use Visual Cues

Many of us memorize things visually. You may actually freeze an image in your mind of the formula, definition or concept which you will be able to access mentally during a test or in times of need.

Use this function of your memory by drawing pictures on flash cards or using different colored markers to write out information you need to memorize.

For example, if you need to memorize Latin or Greek word stems, you may wish to draw pictures that symbolize the meanings of the word stems. The Latin word stem "aqua" means water, so you might write aqua in blue marker and draw a raindrop next to the word stem. The Latin word stem "spec" means look, so you might want to draw a pair of spectacles (glasses) next to the word stem.

Flash cards are helpful for visual memorization, especially if you use pictures and colors as you create them. You may actually remember a word or formula simply because you remember agonizing over whether to write the definition in orange

or green. The color may trigger that visual memory, helping you to access the information.

Habit #54: Employ Shocking Stimuli

Ever had a study session where you just can't seem to memorize important information?

Believe it or not, **using a shocking physical stimulus of one sort or another will help you understand and later remember difficult material.**

According to a study discussed on the PBS special *This Emotional Life*, placing your hand in a bowl of ice water while studying will help you process and later recall the information. This is because the negative stimuli activates the memory segment of your brain (supposedly so you will learn from the shocking experience and not repeat that experience, but it also works just to help you learn something.)

You can use ice water, heat, or mild pain to help yourself remember complex information. Try pinching your arm, holding a baggie of ice in your hand, or holding a hot cup of tea while studying to stimulate your memory. Just don't hurt yourself for real!

Habit #55: Chew Gum

Teachers may ban the chewing of gum in their classes because they don't like to scrape gum off the bottom of desks, but **the actual action of chewing gum can help you learn and perform better on tests.**

A 2011 study published in *Appetite* evaluated the effects of chewing gum while taking tests (on graduate students.) The study concluded chewing gum helped the graduate students for about 20 minutes of the test.

Another study conducted by Baylor College of Medicine on eighth graders taking math tests concluded that the students who chewed gum while taking the tests scored 3 percent higher than the non-gum chewing kids.

Why does this work?

The action of chewing gum stimulates blood flow to your brain and helps you to stay alert.

What types of gum work best?

It doesn't matter if you chew sugar or sugar-free gum, but the flavor does matter.

Go for peppermint, which acts as a mental stimulant and can help you feel clear and focused.

Habit #56: Participate in Class When Least Comfortable

Having trouble with a particular concept?

Most of us want to hunker down and stay below the radar in class until we “get” the concept at hand, but this is a habit that will keep you from learning. **Raise your hand, ask a question or volunteer to be part of a class activity that addresses the topic you are struggling with.**

Not in a class setting? Find someone who understands the concept in question and ask for advice or help. Be vulnerable about the fact that you aren’t “getting it.”

The discomfort you feel, accompanied by the action you take, will heighten your memory response. You’ll get the answers you need and will remember the right material later on, when you need it most.

Habit #57: Highlight and Rephrase Reading Material

When reading dense material, you may find the words blur before your eyes. Underline and highlight key words and concepts as you read. Say the words or concepts out loud as you highlight them, and then write down the material (rephrased) in your study book. This will help you to digest the material instead of glossing over it.

Habit #58: Make up a Rhyme or Song

While you won’t need to do this for most material, you may find it helpful to create a limerick, poem, rhyme or catchy song to help you remember especially challenging formulas.

Just like kids learn the “Fifty Nifty United States” by song, **you may find it easier to remember a formula if you come up with a musical way to remember it.**

Why does this work? Many formulas don’t make sense to us. They look like a list of random numbers and letters, or feel like a random set of instructions that lack connecting material.

If you turn the formula into a song or rhyme, you are making sense of something that once felt irrational, and this making sense of the material allows your brain to capture the information and hold it in a way that you can access it again later.

Habit #59: Look for Imagery Links

Similarly, it may help you to **look for links between dates or individual items that you need to memorize in order, in a list.**

When I was younger, I had trouble memorizing dates or orders of items in a list because the numbers or order didn't seem important to me. That made assignments like memorizing a list of American Presidents (by date or in order) almost impossible for me.

However, by linking the names together or linking dates and presidents' names together using imagery, I overcame this problem.

For example, let's take this list of presidents:

George Washington
John Adams
Thomas Jefferson
James Madison

Now create images that link these four presidents.

I created the following images:

Atoms being washed in a washing machine (Washington, Adams)
A chef and his son cooking up the atoms (Adams, Jefferson)
An angry (mad) sun looking up out of the stove the chef is using (Jefferson, Madison)

You can do the same thing with dates. Find a way to link the date and name in significance, using a play on numbers or sounds. You probably already did something like this when you needed to memorize a password or phone number.

Find a way to associate the numbers with the name in a catchy way that makes sense to you.

Habit #60: Take Study Breaks

If you try to study for long periods of time, you'll find your productivity falls after you've been studying for a while. **Studies show that you should take a 10-minute break every hour to maximize your productivity.**

What should that break consist of?

Be sure to stand up, use the restroom and get a drink or snack. It's best if you can leave the room you are in entirely and can move to get your blood flowing. If possible, do some jumping jacks or stretches to get your heart pumping and to

wake yourself up. Then dive back in.

Habit #61: Find Practical Applications

Having trouble memorizing a formula or theory?

The problem is that you probably haven't found a real life application for the concept, which is why it isn't lodging in your memory bank.

Find a word problem that forces you to imagine actually putting the formula or concept into practice and do the problem. If possible, act out or visualize the impact of the problem in a practical way. This will help you "get" the formula or concept you need to recall later.

Habit #62: Make Physical Representations

Some concepts are tough to grasp until you see a physical representation or an illustration of the idea.

For example, it may help you to see a representation of a strand of DNA or the anatomy of a cell so you can visualize the impact of microscopic procedures. If you can't make a physical representation or picture, find images online that will help you visualize the problem.

Habit #63: Read Important Information Before Bed

The mind keeps working even when we're sleeping. Read over summaries of notes right before bed so your mind can solidify the memories as you sleep.

Don't read over anything that is disturbing or upsetting (or you'll risk disrupting your sleep.) Instead use this tool to reinforce basic concepts and information you will need to know later.

Habit #64: Practice Breathing Exercises

Stress inhibits both your ability to concentrate and your ability to access information you've already processed.

This is why you might be able to understand a concept while in class but then find yourself stumped when you're in a testing environment. You know the information is somewhere in your mind, but you just can't access it because stress is shutting down your body's ability to concentrate on anything but your flight or flight response.

To combat stress, spend three to five minutes on a deep breathing exercise.

Find a quiet spot, set a timer, close your eyes and then focus on nothing but your breathing. Breathe in as deeply as is comfortable, hold your breath until you feel slight discomfort, and then exhale slowly until you feel complete release.

Repeat this until your timer goes off, refusing to worry about anything, but instead focusing on how good it feels to simply breathe.

Chapter 5: Health and Eating Habits

Your health has a bigger impact than you might realize. It can affect your ability to participate in activities you love, your self esteem, your appearance, your energy level and your life expectancy.

Every time you establish a habit that improves your health, you add time and enjoyment to your life. Every time you establish a habit that negatively affects your life, you subtract time from your life span and reduce your ability to enjoy your life.

I personally consider this chapter to be the most important chapter of the book.

Why?

Because this chapter affects your ability to put the rest of the book into practice. I urge you to master as many of these healthy habits as possible, transforming yourself into the healthiest you possible.

Habit #65: Eat Within Thirty Minutes of Waking

If you're like me, you never feel like eating first thing in the morning, but eating right away helps jumpstart your metabolism.

Personal Trainer Shaun Horner, author of the *Four-Hour Body* Tim Ferriss, and the Commander Navy Installations Command all agree that taking in calories right away alerts your body to the fact that you are not in starvation mode and that it's time to burn some calories.

Eat a “half breakfast” of something small but nutritious like half an English muffin with peanut butter, a banana or a hard boiled egg. Follow up with a second half breakfast an hour or so later to continue delivering the right signals to your body.

Avoid high sugar, high calorie foods that will just spike your insulin production, and stick to foods that send the message that your body will get adequate nutrition and calorie intake so your metabolism to rise accordingly.

Habit #66: Move Your Body Morning and Mid Day

To maximize your calorie burning capabilities of the day, you'll want to get moving right away, too. If you can exercise first thing in the morning (right after that banana!), you will send your body two messages, both of which scream (BURN CALORIES!)

If you can't put in a full exercise session first thing in the morning, at

least get your heart rate up for a full five minutes.

Try jumping rope, jumping jacks, running up and down the stairs in your house, squats or push ups and sit ups. If that is too much, try exiting the subway one exit sooner than necessary and walking the extra five minutes to work or parking in the furthest away parking spot at work and getting in a brisk walk.

Follow up by moving your body a second time over your lunch break.

Walk to lunch, spend part of your lunch break exercising, or even run errands over your break. By getting your heart rate up and your blood pumping, you're keeping your body in healthy calorie-burning mode. You'll also keep your heart and lungs from getting sluggish and will prevent the formation of blood clots, which can happen if you sit for long periods of time without moving.

Habit #67: Replace One Processed Food Every Day

Most processed foods (such as crackers, bread, muffins, pasta) are higher in calories and lower in fiber and nutrition than unprocessed foods (like a carrot, sweet potato, apple or orange.)

Our country is used to eating processed foods, both for meals and for snacks. You might be accustomed to eating cereal for breakfast or a bag of Doritos for a mid day snack.

To improve your health, replaced one processed food with one unprocessed food every day.

You may want to opt for the apple instead of the baguette when eating *Panera* at lunchtime, or maybe you'll decide to eat eggs and a grapefruit for breakfast instead of eggs and toast.

This uptake in fiber and nutrition and decrease in the consumption of processed foods will help you in multiple ways. The increased nutrition will fuel your body with energy and improved immunity to illness, while the increased fiber will help cleanse your colon and keep you feeling full longer.

Habit #68: Develop a Taste for Plain Raw Vegetables

One of the healthiest things you can do for your body is to eat at least one serving of raw vegetables each day. Raw vegetables contain fiber that takes longer to digest (than cooked vegetables) and nutrients (and enzymes) that have been unaltered by heat. Eating a fresh serving of a raw vegetable will help you feel full, get hydrated and prevent you from binging on higher calorie foods.

Want to turn this into a habit?

Commit to eating a serving of raw vegetables every day at ten in the morning. Eat a couple stalks of celery, a handful of baby carrots or a sliced cucumber. You'll feel full and healthy, and you won't be tempted to eat a high sugar granola bar or brownie. Vegetables are super low in calories, so you'll get your nutrition and sense of fullness while keeping calorie intake low.

Habit #69: Eat Multiple Small Meals a Day

I don't know about you, but I was brought up to expect to eat three big meals a day, plus an afternoon snack and desert before bed. The average American consumes between 3,000-4,000 calories each day on this meal plan, which, as you can deduct from just looking around you, has resulted in an obesity problem in our country.

This leads to people trying to starve themselves, skipping breakfast and picking at lunch, only to binge around 4 p.m. and eating half the house during the evening. Again, from looking around you at the general public, you can see that this plan has not worked so well, either.

To remain slim (and prevent binging), you'll want to keep a slow but steady drip of calories coming into your body all day.

You can do this best by eating about six small meals a day, each meal somewhere between 200-400 calories apiece. The steady caloric intake will tell your body it needs to keep burning calories, and the eating of these small meals will keep you from feeling hungry or deprived at any point.

Habit #70: Drink Red Wine Instead of Cocktails or Beer

I love to relax with a beer at the end of some days, and a party just isn't a party without a cocktail. Unfortunately, the average bottle of beer serves up approximately 150 calories, and cocktails can pack anywhere from 115 (5-ounce bloody Mary) to 490 (eggnog with rum) calories. Even white wine will cost you around 200 calories per glass.

If you can develop a taste for red wine, you'll get the delight of an alcoholic beverage for only about 100 calories per glass. Add in the health benefits of red wine – lowering cholesterol, improving heart health, antioxidants – and you've got a list of good reasons to truly enjoy that glass of wine.

Habit #71: Choose Spices Over Butter or Cream Sauces

Want to lower your cholesterol, reduce your calorie intake and improve your digestion?

Then you'll want to familiarize yourself with spices and remove cream sauces and

butter from your recipes.

We use butter and cream in recipes because of the fabulous flavor, right?

Spices add a great deal of flavor without clogging your arteries or making you gain weight. In fact, several different spices will help you keep your blood sugar stable (cinnamon), improve your digestion (ginger) and improve your immunity (turmeric.)

Instead of making your favorite cream-based or butter-based dish, look up a spicy dish instead. **Learn how to combine spices to create flavors you love.** When out at a restaurant, look for meals seasoned with spice rubs and then grilled or baked and avoid any dish that uses cream or butter.

Habit #72: Order Tea Instead of Soda

If you're craving caffeine and usually drink soda, **trade your afternoon Coke in for a glass of unsweetened iced (or hot) tea.** You'll save 120 calories on that 12-ounce soft drink, plus you'll flood your body with much-appreciated antioxidants.

Once you develop a taste for teas, you'll find you have an inexpensive beverage you can brew yourself or order while out and can drink hot or cold. You'll quickly discover how many varieties of tea there are, both caffeinated and decaffeinated.

You'll also save yourself from imbibing unnecessary chemicals (if you're a diet soda drinker) and carbonation, which can make you feel bloated.

Green tea in particular is good for revving up your metabolism, and ginger tea is good for your digestion.

Senna tea promotes regularity, and yerba mate provides a subtle stimulant similar to but smoother than caffeine.

Chamomile or valerian tea will help you relax or fall asleep. Herbal teas are tasty (and often fruity or spicy.)

Habit #73: Make Exercise Appointments

Instead of leaving exercise to chance, schedule it like you would a meeting or appointment. It's easy to say, "Oh, yeah... maybe I'll get to the gym tonight," and it's even easier to decide, "Today was too exhausting of a day... I'll work out tomorrow."

If you schedule in your workouts, bring your exercise equipment with you (gym bag, towel, gym clothes, running shoes) and ask a friend to join you, you'll be far

less likely to skip exercise.

Better yet, set a goal (for example, sign up for a triathlon or a running race) and then find a training program that will get you ready for the event.

You can easily find couch-to-5K apps for your smart phone or training programs online. Use these guides to help you plan out what you should be doing each day, and then schedule your exercise into your weekly plan. You'll be more likely to exercise and to meet your fitness goals.

Habit #74: Question Your Cravings

Most of us get cravings from time to time. (Some of us get them every day.) It's easy to think there is no way around your cravings for sweets or salty foods, but in many cases, there are super healthy alternates that are much better for you than a donut or bag of chips.

Try the following options when you experience cravings.

If you crave...

- A bear claw donut, eat two squares of super good dark chocolate
- Sugary candy, eat fresh fruit
- A bag of chips, eat crunchy veggies sprinkled with sea salt
- An order of french fries, make your own homemade fries using Pam in the broiler
- Greasy food, eat salmon or tuna

If you struggle with cravings often, you may wish to read up on the physiology of cravings to learn what specific nutrients your body is craving when you want specific foods.

This can help you make healthy choices.

Habit #75: Turn Social Interactions Into Exercise Opportunities

Having trouble finding time to exercise?

Getting bored while exercising?

A great way to fit more movement into your life is to invite a friend to exercise

with you.

Instead of meeting a friend for drinks, meet to play tennis or go for a walk.

If you love the mall, the two of you can window shop while chatting. If you like the great outdoors, walk in the neighborhood or go hiking. If you're both athletic, meet to jog or bike while you catch up.

When you replace sedentary social activities (especially parties or meeting out for coffee or lunch) with exercise (even mild exercise), you'll expend calories instead of rack them up.

Your time exercising will pass quickly because you'll be focused on talking to your friend instead of just getting through the fitness class or workout routine.

Habit #76: Plan Your Meals Ahead of Time

Leaving your meals to chance means chancing your nutrition and dietary health. Most of us, when hungry and without a plan, will grab something to eat that is convenient or premade.

Where do we get this kind of food?

Restaurants (fast food or sit down), the freezer (frozen meals) or the pantry (snack food instead of real food.)

I don't know about you, but I never decide to roast beets in the oven or bake a healthy acorn squash when I'm ravenous. Instead, I'll eat a couple granola bars or whip up a huge stack of pancakes or get a value meal at the drive through.

Healthy meals typically require planning and grocery shopping.

If you eat out, you'll probably consume more calories than if you cook at home, so it's better to make a habit of planning and shopping ahead of time so you can pack healthy meals to take with you (and have a healthy plan for when you get home at night.)

Plan ahead and save yourself a bundle of calories, not to mention money, as well.

Habit #77: Take a Walk Every Day

This is perhaps the most powerful habit of all. You might think there's nothing to it, but a simple 20-30 minute walk each day will:

- Act as a mild antidepressant

- Increase your metabolism
- Help you let go of stress
- Infuse you with a healthy amount of vitamin D, which works to strengthen your immune system and help you feel positive
- Improve your self esteem
- Help you slim down

Walking is one of the healthiest habits you can cultivate. While strenuous exercise is beneficial, you will avoid injury and recover better from intense exercise if you warm up, cool down and make time for recovery all through walking sessions.

You can even accomplish things while walking. Talk into a dictation machine, catch up with a friend (on the phone or in person), visit with neighbors, plan out your week, work through emotional duress – walking is gentle enough that you can do more than just exercise.

Conclusion: 77 Habits Summarized

I hope you feel inspired to tackle a goal and make some healthy changes in your life.

Remember to choose carefully and invest time into establishing each new habit.

You'll want to practice new habits until they become second nature, just a part of who you are. Then you can add new habits, gradually replacing bad habits with good habits.

One way to get started is to check out the page on [30 Day Habit Challenges](#), which shows my plan for developing **permanent habits** *every* single month.

Check out what I'm currently doing and then make the commitment to try your own habit challenge.

Whatever your journey, whatever your goal, I wish you well.

May your habits bring you joy, health and success!

Cheers,

S.J. Scott

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