

Forming Habits

Regular exercise is much easier to sustain once it has become a habit. But how do we form new habits? The short answer... consistency. The longer answer...

Forming a habit is the process where a behaviour becomes automatic, achieved through regular repetition. Take brushing your teeth for example. From a very young age, your parents always told you to brush your teeth before bed. At first, you protested, you didn't want to, you just wanted a story. But once you started doing it, every night, before bed, it started to be a part of your bedtime routine. It was a habit. And to this day, people will brush their teeth before bed. Without really thinking about it. Habit successfully formed. Thanks mum and dad.

Regular exercise can be the same. Once you get into that routine, if you stick to it consistently, over a long period of time, it will become automatic. But it does take time and this is where people often stop. Most people know the 'it takes 21 days to form a habit' saying. But research has shown that it can actually be much longer than that. Everyone is different and it depends on the behaviour and the circumstances, but they say it could take anywhere from 18 to 254 days to form that habit. So I recommend living by the 21/90 rule... Commit to your new routine 21 days straight. Once you have done 21 days straight, it should have started to become a habit. Now continue for another 90 days to really establish it. Once you have done this, especially with exercise, even if you miss a couple of days, it will be easier to get back into the swing of things. And you might even say you miss it ❓❓
A couple of things to help you during those first 21 days.

Accountability buddy – It helps to have a buddy to keep you accountable. Some days you will lack motivation, and that is normal, but when you have a buddy, they can pick you up and get you on your feet. And when they lack the motivation, you can do the same for them. Workout buddies are the best for accountability.

Triggers – Have triggers to remind you to do it. Working out in the morning – get your workout clothes so it reminds you that the next thing in your morning routine is exercise. Have triggers that help remind you that you are trying to form a new habit. Keep it simple – if you don't exercise at all and you suddenly set your sights on 6 training days a week, that is not keeping it simple and will most likely be a very hard habit to form. But starting with 2-3 days a week, and then once those habits are formed, building on from them, that is a much better way to get to those 6 days a week.

Goals – have a clear vision of why you are trying to form this habit. This is why goal setting can be so beneficial. If you have goals, and write them down, it reminds you why you are doing what you are doing. Why it is important to you.

James Clear, the author of "Atomic Habits – An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones" (good read, highly recommend), says there are 3 R's of habit change. **Reminder** – the triggers that initiate the behaviour. **Routine** – the action you take. **Reward** – the benefit you gain from taking that action (achieving your goals).

Whatever you do, be consistent. This is ultimately the key to forming a new habit.

There are little things you can do to help you be consistent, but it all leads back to making a daily routine, this is what will help that habit stick long term.