



MODERN HEALTH MONK

Why All Diets Fail & Why You Don't Need a Diet to Lose Weight

Part 1: Is The Diet Really What You Need to Keep Changing?



Do all these new diets ever bug the crap out of you? It seems like there's a new diet every week (I think statistically speaking there's a new one every few weeks.)

Just last week I was in Barnes and Noble and saw half a dozen new diets on the shelf — most were some kind of re-purposed Atkins, Paleo, or Gluten-free diet, but some were new.

But to me it's not really surprising that modern consumers have **no clue who to trust** in the health & wellness space. A new diet every month. A new guru every month. Sites like Bodybuilding.com geared towards bodybuilders but actually in the business of pushing supplements (that often do nothing) on customers.

And these are all marketed towards people that have the same hope: the belief in quick fixes. New guide? Maybe it'll have something the others don't. New supplement? Maybe it's a revolutionary new *uber-antioxidant* from a pillaged rain forest in South America.

So who do you trust? The story almost always ends up the same when I hear it from people:

"I have no idea who to trust anymore, so I give up, I'm just going to eat what I like, enjoy my life, and stop stressing over it."

Sound familiar?

To top off the frustration, **It doesn't matter which diet you choose because most people can't stick to *any* diet.**

I don't blame anyone for not wanting to invest time into figuring out what's healthy and unhealthy, what gives you cancer, and what makes you live forever. It's incredibly frustrating.

And that's why I want to draw your attention to one key fact today:

Research has shown that whether you stick to your diet is *more important than which diet you stick to.*

So I'm going to go out on a limb here and tell you something you already know – you can't lose weight, get fit, or fix chronic pain without creating proper habits *and then sticking to them.*

But there's another problem: most of us don't think we have the willpower to force these new habits, force ourselves to go to the gym, force ourselves to stop drinking sod, or force ourselves to start cooking every meal every day.

Fortunately, it's not about willpower or forcing it.

Why willpower is ineffective and why you don't need it to stick with good habits

For a long time people talked about willpower and assumed it to be *the* “defining” quality of the successful. Discipline. Grit. Fortitude.

Whether you were a successful businessman, superfit with an insanely non-existent sweet tooth, or someone who just seemed to be successful in everything they did – people assumed it was because of willpower and discipline.

Discipline. God I hate that word – and I bet you do too right?

Because we assume that all people that have gotten somewhere in life or managed to turn their health around are gods and goddesses of willpower and discipline that just forced themselves to do more things they hate. And that led to their success.

Except it's not really true. Not always, anyways.

A few years ago, someone asked me how I adhered to such a strict diet of almost no-sweets. I told them “I just do it” which I now realized wasn't very useful advice for someone wanting to change their habits for the better.

I just assumed that I was born with more willpower and discipline than most people.

Research shows **willpower to function like a muscle that has limited power** especially as the day goes on. So were those people “born” without willpower and discipline out of luck? Are they doomed to a life of mediocrity and frail health?

Not at all.

Years later I realized that this was a massively wrong assumption. Willpower is actually not quite as constant and as “built-in” as one might think. Many complex factors affect the strength of your willpower on a daily basis – sleep (and lack of), stress and nutrition to name a few.

So willpower is not exactly the most reliable way to maintain a health and fitness regime or get started. It’s too variable. And health is something that *has to be a priority* – so you can’t rely upon something as variable as willpower to keep you healthy.

That’s when I there was a much better “secret.”

The secret was, in fact, habits.

Why Your New Year's Resolutions Always Fail



I'm going to tell you something you may love or hate me for: You don't fail to stick with your new year's resolution because of lack of willpower or lack of discipline. You're not lazy, you're not "unmotivated," you just have no idea about how much of your life (and your "success") is governed by your habits.

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

- Aristotle

Everything about you – success, health, happiness, prejudices, friends, aspirations, outlook on life – is all because of habits and patterns of habitual thinking and acting.

Really. You are born with certain things, your environment causes certain things, your life experiences cause certain things – and all of these ingrain certain patterns in your brain.

The cool thing is that just about anything can be un-done (or changed for the better), and the field of neuroplasticity (literally – moldable brain) has shown us that **the brain can literally, physically, be re-wired** to accommodate new habits and new ways of thinking.

That's good news for you. Whether you want to finally lose some weight on a diet that actually works, get bigger and gain muscle, or simply start waking up early and meditating, or just be a better spouse – you can do it as long as you understand *the nature of habits*.

The Science Behind Habits

When you wake up, do you take a shower and then brush your teeth, or brush your teeth and then take a shower? Habits.

When you get stuck, bored or frustrated at work, do you hop outside for a quick smoke break? Habits.

Late at night, after you've been watching some TV close to bedtime, do you crave one last sweet thing? Habits.

When you get into a fight with your spouse – do you remain calm and stay relaxed, or explode and get defensive and tense? Habits!

As it turns out, habits are created in a three step process:

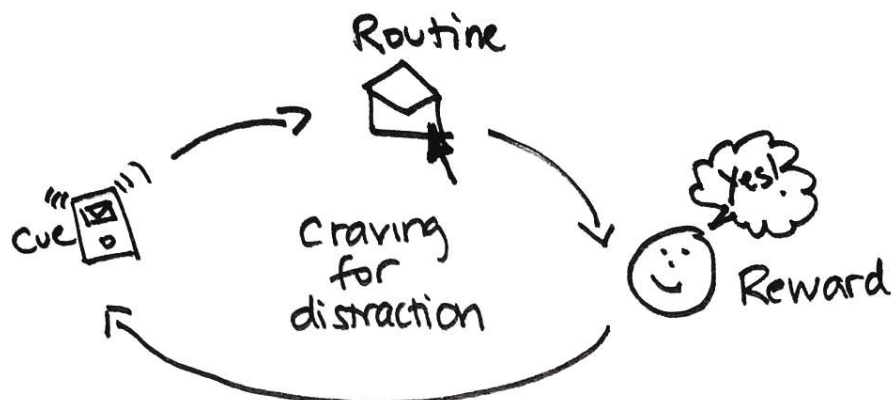
1. **Cue**
2. **Routine**
3. **Reward**

The cue is whatever sets off the behavior and triggers it. For the smoker, they might be sitting at work around 3 pm when they start getting really bored. They feel like they can't concentrate and need a break. They feel agitated and need to do something. That's the **cue**.

So what does the smoker do? She gets up and goes for for a smoke break and takes a little walk / de-stress session outside. That's the **routine**.

As a result, she feels relaxed and much more calm than before. That's the **reward**.

Here's another example many of you are probably familiar with: **Compulsive texting / emailing**.



As a habit that many of us are all too familiar with, it goes something like this: We see the text or email on our phone, we see the blinking light, or the vibration, or the notification, and then we have the craving to open the message or check our email. For many of us, we can ignore it a little bit.

But then more and more messages come and the craving becomes stronger. We can't ignore it any longer and we have to check the phone even if it's under the table.

Here, the **cue is the notification** that you have a message coming through. **The behavior** is that you check your text message or email. **And the reward** is that you get relief/satisfaction that you've checked the message and no longer are curious what it's about.

How do you break the habit in this case? One way is to turn off the cue. So instead of letting your phone notify you of incoming messages, you turn off the notifications and put your phone out of site. No cue ==> no behavior. The cycle is broken.

So what exactly does this imply for dieters or people who can't stick to diets no matter what?

How to Start (Effortless) Health And Fitness Habits, And Break Bad Ones



Here's the part you've been waiting for.

Ultimately all this talk about diets and willpower had the purpose of *discouraging using willpower and discipline* (because they take so much effort – and likely are unsustainable for most of us), and *encouraging* the formation of good habits (which become effortless).

It's much more likely that you'll stick with something that takes less effort than something that is a constant struggle every day.

So let me go through a couple examples of putting this habit stuff to work in a couple situations.

“Eat Your Veggies, Honey!”

Did anyone else hate hearing that as a kid? I was pretty much a typical kid that would have preferred chicken nuggets every night over broccoli, but was forced to shovel in mouthful after mouthful of broccoli. Interesting fact: to this day I usually eat my vegetables first because I was used to shoving them down my throat and getting rid of the bad stuff first.

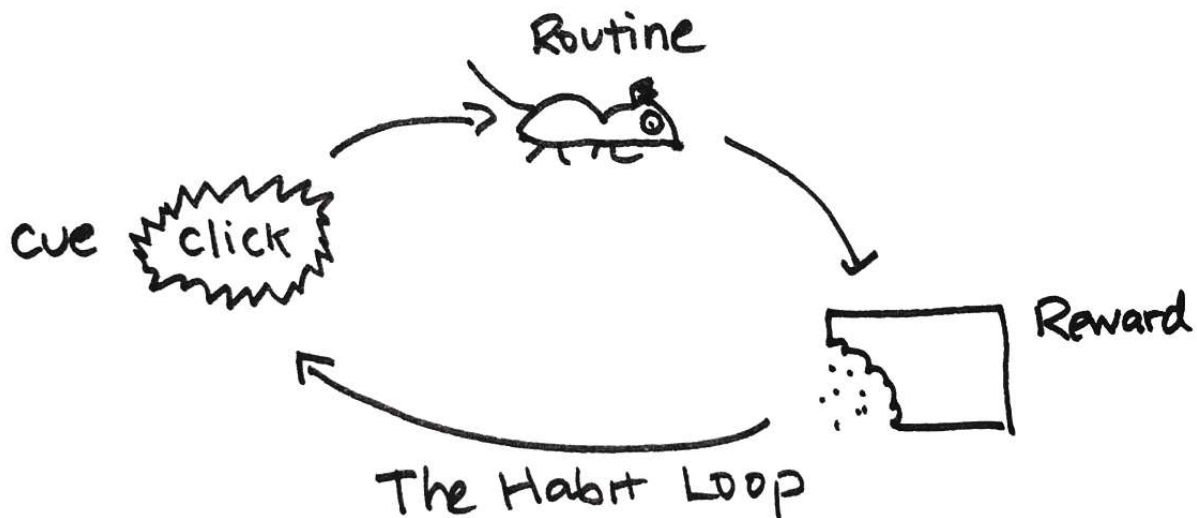
Most of us know that **dietary changes will make up 80%+ of your results, when it comes to changing your body.** Whether that's for people who are losing weight, or skinny folks trying to gain muscle — diet controls almost all of your success, which is why you should devote a disproportionate amount of time to fixing your dietary habits *first*.

In college, I had a roommate that drank 8 (or more) cans of Coke per day.

Obviously, he was obese. He also experienced such severe caffeine withdrawal if he lowered the “dose” that he was physiologically hooked on soda like any smoker is hooked on nicotine.

One thing I noticed was that he stashed his coke right next to the computer — and everytime he was casually using his computer or playing a video game, he would (almost unconsciously) reach for a coke and crack it open.

For a lot of people, consuming the “wrong foods” happens like any other habit — with a cue or trigger of some sort (Even if that means boredom). For my roommate, that cue was using the computer and playing video games. So let's take a look at the habit formation cycle again and see how we might go about fixing my college roommate's habits.





Cue: Using the computer, feeling a bit sleepy and bored

Behavior: Drink 1 (or more) Coca Cola

Reward: Tastes good, wake up a bit, stimulation

The key to breaking habits lies in a few principles (for now we'll just talk about breaking bad habits), known as the *Golden Rule of Habit Change*:

1. Keep the same cue
2. Change the behavior / routine
3. Keep the same reward

Here's one of the rules about habits: *you can't totally eliminate a bad habit*. It still leaves those neural patterns in your brain, so you have to *change the routine* instead and replace it. Otherwise it's easy to fall back into the old habit



Bad habits cannot totally be eliminated – but they can be replaced with some

He could walk to his friend's apartment, go grab a cup of coffee, head to the gym, or just walk around campus for a quick breather.

Now remember the golden rule — if you have a bad habit you want to change, keep the cue the same, and keep the reward the same, just change the behavior.

So now my roommate's **cue is the same** — the afternoon when he sits down by the computer and he feels a bit bored and tired.

His **routine is different** — he decided to go walk over to his friend's apartment for an hour.

But the **reward is the same** — he feels a little bit more energized, and he has something to do.

Example #2: I want to stop having my afternoon sweets at work everyday.

This is an example I think will resonate with a lot of people. Let's face it, the majority of us are in jobs we aren't exactly crazy about. That leads to a lot of boredom and repetitive stuff happening throughout the day.

That leads to one craving in particular — the craving for stimulation - *to do something*.



One of my first jobs was in a high school, and I noticed that at about 12:45 every day, two periods before the working day ended for me, I got extremely bored and took a stroll up to the cafeteria to get a cookie. After a while this led to a *craving* for my afternoon sweets that I needed every day to stay sane, almost like the afternoon coffee many people rely on.

If this sounds like you, here's an example of how we'd go about breaking this cycle:

1. What's the **cue**, and why are you doing it? Dig deep, and realize, that many of you aren't craving sweets, you are just craving mental and physical activity. You're bored (especially at work).
2. What's the **routine**? Eating a cookie.
3. What's the **reward**? Feeling like you've done something (craving for stimulation), as well as tasting something sweet.

So how do you go about breaking this afternoon cookie (or coffee) habit at work?

Keeping the golden rule in mind, we keep the cue and the reward, and change the behavior. We know that I was doing this because I was bored as hell at work — so now we change the routine and put in something else.

Instead, I could A) Go for a quick drive around the block, B) Stop by the faculty room and have a chat with some people, C) Grab a magazine/book and start reading, D) Start taking my lunch later, timing it around the moment of my peak boredom.

So now, the new habit cycle looks like this: **Cue** – feeling anxious, bored around 12:45, **Routine:** Go take my lunch (instead of earlier in the day), **Reward:** Feeling like I've done something, feeling stimulated.

Example #3: I want to stop drinking 5 cups of coffee at day at work.

Let's look at one last example for now. I want to stop drinking 5 cups of coffee a day at work. How do I manage to do that? First, you don't try to stop all 5 cups of coffee, you cut down by 1 cup a day.



Then, we go into our habit cycle:

1. What's the **cue**? Remember to dig deep for the *why* – and we learn that I have *mentally associated coffee with work*. As soon as I brew a fresh cup, I sit down and become super productive. It signals work time.
2. What's the **routine** – I drink a coffee, sit down and become super productive
3. What's the **reward**? – A feeling of satisfaction, completion, productivity

Going back to the golden rule, we remember we only need to change the routine to replace this bad habit with a good one. In this case, the person has mentally associated coffee (*NOT the caffeine "high"*) with productivity and doing work.

We need to replace this habit with some other signal that gets me in the zone, which could be a number of things:

- An online timer, like [E.ggtimer](#) which will give a loud alert that it's time to start (Work time!)
- Another beverage, like tea, orange juice, or cold water
- Some kind of ritual that the person creates — like clearing the entire desk, setting down a cloth or mat on the desk, and whipping out the to-do list. This 3 part routine could instead become “the cue” that coffee provides.

Now our **cue is still the same** — Something needed to be associated with getting work started.

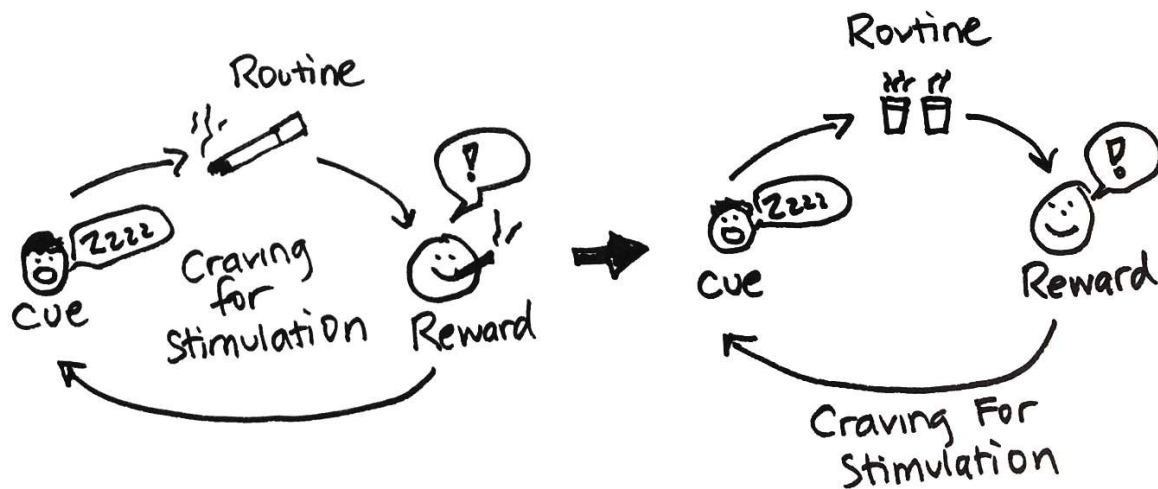
The **routine is different** — This time, I decide to set a loud [E.ggtimer](#) alert to signal when it's time to get work started.

And the reward is the same — Work gets started quickly, and a sense of accomplishment is felt after being productive.

Many Bad Habits Start Due to Boredom — Here's How to Fight it

It's interesting that in the peak era of distraction, so many people complain of boredom, and so many bad habits begin in boredom (compulsive texting, tv watching, constant snacking, internet use, etc.).

I won't go into any specific examples here just for the sake of not writing a book — but you need to understand that in boredom, the craving is for stimulation of the senses.



I've witnessed many friends take up smoking due to boredom at work or school. And I've witnessed an equal amount of friends do the same with sweets.

It all starts with awareness — if you're working on a massive project, and you reach the point of no return when your eyes are glazed over and you stare out the window every 5 minutes, what does that mean? Do you need a cigarette or a cookie? No, you need to take a break.

But many of us don't realize this because we're not present throughout the day. So we mistake that for a cigarette craving, or we crave the physical break that a cigarette break provides.

One way you can observe the "craving for stimulation" in action is to carry around an index card. Every time you reach for your phone while watching TV (when you don't have a notification), or walk to the fridge (and forget why you went), or random open the internet for no good reason, mark an X on the index card.

You'll start to realize how much of this so-called ADD is due to lack of engagement with what you're currently doing. Imagine how many bad habits you are potentially forming without even realizing it?

The key is to stop for a second and say “Hey, I’m reaching for my cell phone because I’m bored, not because I actually want to use it or text someone. So what can I do for stimulation instead that’s actually contributing something to my life?”

The same is true when you walk to the fridge and don’t even realize why you went. Many of us just casually walk over, open the fridge doors, and stare for 30 seconds before wondering why we even went. Habits needs to all start with awareness. Understand that you’re bored (not hungry), and get out of the house.

Kicking Bad Habits and Getting Sexy — Effortlessly



Forget willpower and discipline. They take far too much effort. And most things that take you a ton of effort have a much lower life expectancy than things you just want to do that are easy or effortless.

Instead, focus on the effortless power of habits — healthy eating, after all, becomes just another routine after a while. On a weekly basis I eat zero sweets and watch zero TV. Yes, not even an hour. Do I have massive willpower or discipline? People still wrongly assume that.

But I know that this is merely how I've mentally wired my brain — it's a habit to not even stop foot in a room with a Tv. It's a habit to not even go near the junk food isles in grocery stores. It's a habit to cook all my own food.

I really feel like this is the “secret sauce of success” — imagine how different your health would look in a year of fixing 1 habit a month.

Imagine what your life would look like.