

Martin Mark

# HABITS GUIDE

*How to create big changes  
with small steps!*







I am a Certified Tiny Habits® Coach and I help people who want to improve themselves. I teach how to be a bit better by creating tiny habits, so that you can improve constantly, without depending on motivation and willpower.

In this guide, I will introduce to you what has made a big difference in my life and how I have helped others to also improve their lives.

Martin Mark  
Creator of Habits Mastery  
& Certified Tiny Habits® Coach

[martin@habitsmastery.com](mailto:martin@habitsmastery.com)  
[www.HabitsMastery.com](http://www.HabitsMastery.com)



# Habits and how they can change your life

## Have you ever had any of these challenges?

Have you ever attended an awesome training, meeting, or seminar from where you got a lot of new knowledge and motivation? I bet you have. I am also sure that for a couple of days, weeks, or even months after the seminar, you were implementing what you learned, you had a lot of motivation to do this and you thought that you were going to change your life forever. But what happened? After some time, the motivation started to fade away, your willpower muscle got tired and life got in the way. **You stopped doing the new behaviors and everything went back to the way it was.** Maybe you improved a little bit, but nothing life-changing. You got disappointed and figured out that you need to know something more because implementing the things you learned didn't do the trick. You started to look forward to the next opportunity where you could learn more and in a better way.

You probably also have some books on personal development, you have bookmarked a lot of interesting and helpful blogs, and you surround yourself with all kinds of new information that could help you to improve yourself. You printed out worksheets, downloaded apps, maybe even bought a special notebook. You have read that you have to think big and set tremendous goals and you dream about big changes in your life. **Every once in a while you take on some challenges to finally change something.** You motivate yourself and push your willpower to the limit, to work as hard as you can. You get some results, but you always reach a plateau from where you can't go forward, and sometimes you even fall back.

Actually, I was just writing about my own experiences. But I am quite sure you recognized at least some of the moments and they felt familiar to you.



## My story of struggle

I have been in the self-development field since my early twenties. I have learned a lot in my home country and also abroad from the best in the world. I also started to teach and share my knowledge with others. But I was always running into the same problem and I saw that my students as well. The ones who didn't have intense emotions and motivation to improve their situation (including me) stopped working as the motivation ran out. If your life is already pretty good, there are no big problems to overcome, you can cope with yourself and also your willpower muscle is not so strong, it is so easy to give up. Been there, done that. Although I have always wanted to improve myself, nothing worked after the first easy things that didn't need much motivation, were put into practice. I was relying solely on my motivation. To reach my goals I had to motivate myself all the time because motivation is never constant. It is changing all the time. And this was my big mistake.

## Finding the solution

I started to learn and research how to improve myself without intense emotions and motivation. And then I finally found habits! Habits are the actions we do automatically, without the need for big motivation. I knew at once that I had found something really important. I delved into this subject and started to experiment on myself with everything that I found out. I consciously started to create new habits. Of course not all of them were sticking, because the learning process took time and I tried to take on too big habits at once. While testing different behaviors I understood what is working and what not. Soon enough, when following the rules, the habits started to stick. It was awesome! I saw that I can use consciously created habits to improve any field of my life.







## Getting results

I could say that it all started with drinking a glass of water. Something so simple led to bigger changes and it is the reason why I am writing these lines right now.

The first habit that I successfully created for myself was drinking a glass of water in the morning. I used the knowledge about habits that I had learned and made this new and useful behavior completely automatic in less than a week. I have done this since 2013, so I can confirm that the method I used works also in the long run.



Conquering this new habit made me feel really good and led to something called “success momentum”. Ever since I have created numerous new habits from doing stretching and push-ups in the morning to brushing my teeth thrice as long in the evening. All these small everyday successes have given me confidence, improved my life, and helped me to take on bigger changes (still with small steps and habits).



After learning this topic in depth from Dr. BJ Fogg, Behaviour Scientist at Stanford University, I am since 2014 a Certified Tiny Habits® Coach and I have been coaching people all over the world how to be a bit better by creating new tiny habits.



## The most common myth

With habits, there are some myths around that I would like to address. Quite often after telling people that I work with habits, I get several of them saying to me, “Oh, I know about habits! It takes 21 days to create them.” That is the most common thing that people know about habits. Although, yes, it might take 21 days to form a habit, it also might take 5 days, 33 days, 97 days or no matter how many days and it might still not be enough.

This 21-days myth is so common that every other book promises you to achieve something within 21 days (okay, I am exaggerating a bit). It actually originates from a plastic surgeon Maxwell Maltz who wrote in 1960 in his book “Psycho-Cybernetics” about his discovery that the amputees took on average 21 days to adjust to the loss of a limb and he argued that people take 21 days to adjust to any major life changes. After that, this theory has lived a life on its own.

Since habits depend on so many factors, it is really hard to fixate on one specific number of days that it will take to form one. It depends on the activity, the person, the strength of the willpower muscle, the amount of motivation, the environment, the ability to do the action and so on. The only way to be sure you will form the desired habit is to know exactly how habits are working and use the methods that will eliminate the disturbing factors.



# Habits and how they work

## The habit loop

Now, let's take a look at how habits work.

- The process starts with a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use.
- Then, there is the routine which can be physical or mental, or emotional.
- Finally, there is a reward that helps your brain to figure out if this particular loop is worth remembering for the future.
- This is known as the habit loop.


By understanding how habits work, we can control them.

So what exactly is a trigger? A trigger can be almost anything, from a visual cue such as a candy bar or a television commercial to a certain place, a time of day, an emotion, a sequence of thoughts, or the company of particular people.

You might not remember how a certain habit was born and why you have the triggers you have, but now that you are aware of the importance of the triggers, you can consciously start creating new ones. Just take something that reminds you to do your new desired activity.

A wise idea is to make a trigger out of a certain activity that you already do anyway. I learned this trick from doctor BJ Fogg. For example, the trigger can be opening your laptop (that you do in the mornings anyway). This activity could start a habit of writing a blog post every morning before you do anything else.





The next step after the trigger is the routine itself. Routines can be incredibly complex or fantastically simple (some habits, such as those related to emotions, are measured in milliseconds). According to our example, the routine is the activity of writing a blog post. Routines can also be emotions or thoughts, not only physical activities. You might have a habit, when something goes really well, to think in your mind, "Yes! I did it! I can do anything!"


The final component of the habit loop is a reward. Rewards can range from food or drugs that cause physical sensations to emotional payoffs, such as the feeling of pride that accompany praise or self-congratulation. Rewards can sometimes be hard to notice because they are mostly just feelings, not something we can touch. And again, we can use this knowledge to create rewards for ourselves for doing something that we want to turn into a habit. After doing the activity, allow something good for yourself, something that you'll enjoy and feel good about. Even if it will be something very small, like a short comment or jump or smile.

## Don't rely solely on motivation



Now you know the most basic things about habits and can already start creating them. But let me give you some more details about how to approach the process of creating habits so that you can do it easier and get better results.

Let's take a look at how motivation and the ability to do these desired actions affect the habit-creating process. Every activity depends on the amount of motivation that we have, the level of difficulty, our ability to do this, and of course the trigger. If we don't remember that we have to do something, it doesn't matter if we have a lot of motivation and the activity is really simple.






The higher our motivation, the bigger and the more difficult things we are able to accomplish. As our motivation is never constant and it is always changing, we have to take this into consideration when doing the activities. It's not reasonable to try to do activities that are too complex when our motivation is down. This is a really important part because a lot of people get into trouble for not considering this, which makes them give up and quit




If one morning your motivation is down or you don't have the ability to write a whole new blog post, then **you need to have a backup plan**. Most people just stop and do not write anything and the habit-creating process is broken. Don't do this! At the time when you are making up the habit and deciding what it is that you want to create as a new habit, you have to count on the possibility of this happening. Make a clear decision that you will do this activity every day, no matter what. **And create a simplified version of this habit!** This should be an activity that is only a part of the initial habit, something that is so easy to do that you will not need any motivation at all for doing this.





Let's take the blog post example again. If your goal is to create a habit of writing a full blog post every morning then the backup plan should be for example to write only one paragraph or even only one sentence – something that is so ridiculously simple that it would be impossible not to do. And then don't be hard on yourself if you didn't write the full post. It is perfectly natural that sometimes our motivation is down and our willpower muscle is tired. But! **It is really important that you use the backup plan only and only when really needed.** Be honest with yourself and have integrity. Don't make it a habit to use only the backup plan. Even though the backup plan is better than nothing, you can do more.






So when your motivation is high, use it! Don't waste it. Use the motivation to make plans and preparations for the time when the motivation will be lower. It is really important that you prepare yourself for this time and go through with it, still taking small actions and not stopping everything. Motivation will go up again and it is much easier to continue with your activities when you haven't had a complete stop.

## Creating habits in 5 days?



I will also share with you a method that is a foolproof way to start the habit-creating process. It is the best way to practice how to create habits and to make creating them one of your habits. This method is developed by Dr. BJ Fogg, Behaviour Scientist at Stanford University. I have learned this method from BJ and I am a certified coach of the Tiny Habits® method. I can give you only a short preview for now. For full coaching on this method, you are welcome to become my student.




I would suggest you start your journey of habit creation with this simple process. The aim is to start really small. Take an action that will measure up to the following requirements:

- ▶ you can do this at least once a day
- ▶ it will not take longer than 30 seconds
- ▶ it is simple to do


After you have done this activity, **celebrate!** The stronger you feel a positive emotion after your activity, the faster it will become automatic in your life.





Select an activity that you already do every day and make it the trigger. So your tiny habit should look like this: After I ....., I will ..... (and then I celebrate). For example: After I open my laptop, I will write one sentence (and then I celebrate: Wohoo, I did it!)


I am sure you would want to do more but test this for five days. Don't do more. The point is that this activity is so small and it requires no effort nor motivation so that **your brain will adopt it effortlessly and you will be able to do it automatically in a week.** After that, when this activity is automatic, you can add more to it as extra credit. Add another 30-seconds part to it, but keep the original tiny habit and celebrate right after doing it. If you feel like it, then you can do more. Go on with writing two sentences. Keep it easy to do.



I'm sure you're wondering about the 30 seconds rule. You think that you can't do anything with this time. Actually, you can. These kinds of small habits can change our lives and bring big breakthroughs. What can you do with this time? For example, drink a glass of water in the morning, put one thing in its place, stretch your back, hug your sweetheart, rest your eyes... This small activity can also be the first step of creating a bigger habit. For example, if you haven't been moving for years and at one moment, you decide to start working out, then you can't go for a long run at once. It is too hard and you give up in a couple of days. But putting on your running shoes, opening the front door, closing it, and coming back is simple enough. Yes, it might sound silly, and starting this way will take a lot of time to finally get to a long run, but it is working.


For example, as mentioned before, I also used this method to consciously create my first habit – drinking a glass of water after brushing my teeth in the morning. It is a really good habit healthwise and also for practicing the habit creation process. It is connected with everyday activity, takes less than 30 seconds, and doesn't require any effort.







I have to acknowledge that despite the simplicity, I still had a hard time remembering to do this at first. To solve this, I made a post-it note, set it on the wall next to my toothbrush, I took a special glass for this and put it next to the sink so I wouldn't need to go find it every day. That way, it was comfortable enough and I had no excuses for not doing it. I can say that drinking water in the morning was completely automatic in five days and I'm still doing it today, years later.

## How to change bad habits?



First - it is important that you notice what bad habits you already have. Make it an exercise for yourself, to think about habits and try to notice in what circumstances you are performing them. Without knowing when they happen, it is difficult to make a change.



The easiest way for changing bad habits is just to replace the process. Leave the same triggers and rewards, but do something useful instead. Whatever trigger makes you want to watch TV, use this to pick up a book instead of the remote. You can get the same feeling from reading a book than from watching TV. It takes work to change your brain, but it is worth it. Set yourself reminders that you have to do a new task. Put a post-it note on your remote that says, „Read a book!“. Make the reward stronger and better than the one you get from watching TV. Make it emotional. Praise yourself and let others do this as well! Make the change one step at a time. If you are changing too much, your brain will countermeasures you. Our brain doesn't like big changes and it does whatever possible to sabotage your will.



# Tips for success

All that you have read here until now, covers the basics you need to know about the habit-creating process. Of course, there is more to it but for now, just start using this new knowledge and put it into action. **Start creating habits. Test what works for you and what doesn't.** Change and improve your habits until you have made them automatic.


**Don't overwhelm yourself and start small.** At first, make sure you understand how the habits are working and experiment with them. Take the first week and create some 30-seconds habits. If you manage to do that, then go on and start creating bigger habits. **But always remember to create a small backup habit** so that you would be able to improve all the time and the curves of motivation will be your friends, not enemies.

**Make a commitment to really create a new habit.** Write it down and track your progress. Set yourself reminders so you don't forget them.

**Also make sure you have a supporting environment.** Let your friends and family know that you are making changes and creating habits. Even better, make the changes together. You can work on the same habits or completely different ones. Keep each other accountable and help to overcome difficult periods.

**You can make it as a challenge or a competition.** You can compete even with yourself, but it's better to find others and make it a really fun challenge. Give each other rewards after every week, celebrate together and make it playful. The more you enjoy this process, the better results you will get.





Forget about making big changes and focus on being only a bit better. Believe in the “small steps” philosophy. Small steps that are so easy to take that no obstacle can stop them. Where a lot of motivation is not needed and you will succeed for sure. Where each small action brings you closer to what you want. Where you track what you do and notice what helps or what distracts you from achieving your goal. You just create a personalized system that works for you perfectly. You see the progress. You feel good that you actually did what you planned. And this puts you in a good mood and helps you to do more!

I hope this information has been helpful for you and you have gotten value out of it. I recommend you to start creating new tiny habits that will lead you to success momentum and help you to improve constantly.

If you would like me to coach you personally in creating new habits sign up here: <https://habitsmastery.com/tiny-habits-coach/>

Martin Mark  
Creator of Habits Mastery  
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[martin@habitsmastery.com](mailto:martin@habitsmastery.com)  
[www.HabitsMastery.com](http://www.HabitsMastery.com)





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