

Build Healthy Habits

Building healthy habits is key to living well, aging well, and managing a long-term health condition. But if you've ever set a new health goal, you know that changing behavior is easier said than done. Building healthy habits isn't easy, but it's worth it, and these 3 steps can help you succeed.

1. Make a plan.

Make a clear plan of action before you begin your new habit. Start by defining your "why." Why do you want to make this change? What will be different about your life when you succeed? Write down your "why" and remember it or post it somewhere in your home. When challenges present themselves, it'll help you stay on track.

Next, figure out what long-term goal you want to reach, and which new habit will get you there. For example, you may want to change your eating habits by eating more fruits and vegetables. It will help to decide how many per day, and how you can add them into your meals and snacks. Choose your action and make it SMART. This means:

S- specific

M- measurable

A- achievable

R- relevant

T- time-bound

Instead of saying "I'll eat more vegetables," try a SMART goal like "I'll eat a side salad with dinner on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays."

2. Be accountable.

Did you know that tracking a new habit makes you more likely to succeed? Tracking your progress can help you figure out what's working and what isn't, so you can learn as you go. It also encourages you to keep going and hold yourself accountable.

Some people prefer to track on their own with an online app, food diary, notebook, or spreadsheet. Other people benefit from social support to stay on track, like a walking partner, a gym buddy, members of their household, or friends who'll keep them honest. If you have diabetes or prediabetes, don't forget about some of the programs that can provide additional support. Diabetes self-management education and support (DSMES) is available for people with diabetes, and the National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP) can help you prevent or delay type 2 diabetes if you have prediabetes.

3. Recognize your success.

Find rewards that celebrate your success while also supporting your health goals. This could include taking time for your favorite hobbies, relaxing, or treating yourself to something on your wish list.

You may feel discouraged if you've started a new habit and don't see results right away. But that doesn't mean your habit isn't working. It's also OK if things don't always go according to plan. Sometimes the biggest success to celebrate is picking yourself up and not giving up.

Looking for inspiration?

At the end of the day, your healthy habit is completely up to you.

Here are a few ideas if you're looking for a place to start:

Increase fruits and vegetables.

Cook more meals at home instead of getting takeout.

Cut back on unhealthy foods like salty and sugary snacks.

Substitute whole grains (e.g., brown rice instead of white rice).

Add short walks into your routine.

Try a new activity at home like yoga, tai chi, Zumba, or strength exercises.

Increase your water intake.

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