

fit women's fitness

JANUARY 2018
+ AUS \$6.95 NZ \$7.99

**UNLOCK
COURAGE**

7 hacks for a
fearless you

**3 MOVES TO
kickstart
results**

Get glowing
WITH OUR
EXPERT GUIDE

**SCULPT
SEXY ABS**

+ BROOKE HOGAN'S
HOT-BODY SECRETS

**LESS
STRESS,
MORE
CHILL**

Beat busy today

**FEAST
ON THIS!
SUMMER'S
MUST-TRY
RECIPES**

**Live your
dreams**
in 2018

**HOW TO SMASH
ANY GOAL**



Print Post approved
PP100009282

HOW TO MAKE ANY GOAL HAPPEN

Buh-bye, short-lived resolutions, hello long-lasting changes! Use our expert advice to win at life in 2018



THERE'S NOTHING LIKE THAT NEW YEAR FEELING, full of untapped opportunities and fresh adventures – but hands up if you often feel a slight sense of dread mixed in with the anticipation? You can't help but think back on all those promises you made to yourself last New Year's Eve – stop eating so much chocolate, cut back on social media, get to the gym three times a week – and your stomach sinks as you realise that you haven't managed to make any of them stick.

Well, that was last year. This time round, you'll approach your goals with a solid plan based on advice from leading experts in habit formation and behaviour change. Welcome to your life, made better!

HIT REPEAT

Whether your goal is to pound the pavement on the regular or pack a healthy lunch for work every day, forming a new habit requires repeating the behaviour until it becomes as automatic as fastening your seatbelt when you get in the car.

“A simple behaviour can become habitual fairly quickly,” says Barbara Mullan, an associate professor at Curtin University who specialises in habit formation. “It’s all about making it part of your routine – the more you do it, the easier it becomes. And while a more complex behaviour can require a lot of planning to get into the routine, it works in the same way [through repetition].”

Just don’t expect to become a #fitgirl overnight. Researchers at University College London found that it takes an average of 66 days for a habit to form, with some participants needing only 18 days and others requiring up to 254 days.

Before you throw in the gym towel, take heart in the finding that simple reminders can help you turn behaviours into habits. Mullan and her colleagues have discovered that a cue such as a poster or a phone screensaver was enough to prompt adults who were trying to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption to eat those foods.

SWAP BAD FOR GOOD

Fatboy Slim was onto something when he sang, “Eat, sleep, rave, repeat.” Bad habits are also formed through repetition, and they eventually become ingrained in our brains via a mechanism known as the habit loop. A habit loop is made up of three stages: cue, routine and reward. When you’ve had a stressful day at work (cue), you pour yourself a glass of wine (routine) and feel more relaxed (reward). When you don’t feel like working (cue), you check Insta (routine) and forget about that looming deadline (reward).

The first step in breaking the powerful habit loop is to identify your cues, routines and rewards. Over the course of a week, take notes in a journal each time you engage in your habit. Write down the time of day, what happened and how you felt just before you engaged in the habitual behaviour, and how the reward made you feel. At the end of the week, read over your observations to gain a clearer picture of your triggers and patterns.

Now it’s time to create an ‘if-then’ plan that’s in line with your goals. Say you want to stop having a cheeky wine to relax when

“A simple behaviour can become a habit fairly quickly. It’s all about making it a part of your routine”

you’re wound up. Your ‘if-then’ plan can be, ‘If I feel like having a glass of wine, then I’ll have a peppermint tea instead.’ If you use social media as a procrastination tool, you could say, ‘If I have an important deadline, then I’ll turn off my phone.’

While the ‘if-then’ strategy has proven to be very effective in a range of studies, Mullan notes it’s not foolproof. “On a Friday night, a glass of water isn’t going to do it if you want a glass of wine,” she says. “In those instances, you’re probably better off disrupting your routine for a while until you get out of the habit.”

So, until you feel like your habit loop has been significantly weakened, opt for a more drastic ‘if-then’ plan that shakes up your routine. Try, ‘If I’m having a hard day at work, then I’ll go straight to the gym when I clock off rather than going home and having a drink.’ Or, ‘If I need to focus on work, then I’ll go to the meeting room and leave my phone at my desk.’

EMPLOY MINDFULNESS

You’ve probably heard that mindfulness – or paying attention to the present moment – can help you reduce stress and anxiety. But did you know that it can help you break bad habits too?

“Mindfulness can help with habits such as stress-eating and smoking,” says Dr Judson Brewer, Director of Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School’s Center for Mindfulness. “If you eat four cupcakes every time you’re stressed, it might make you feel a bit better so you keep habitually doing that. But if you start paying attention while you’re eating those cupcakes, and you get curious about what they feel like in your body, you realise, ‘Oh, that’s a gut bomb and I don’t feel good.’ The same thing happens when I ask smokers to tell me what their cigarettes taste like. They realise they don’t taste very good, so the reward isn’t so rewarding anymore and they’re suddenly motivated to quit.”

Don’t trust yourself to be mindful next time you’re faced with a tub of ice cream? No worries – there are apps for that. “We’ve developed apps that train people in understanding their minds and using mindfulness to hack the system,” says Brewer. “We have one for smoking

(cravingtoquit.com), one for stress eating (goeatrightnow.com) and one for anxiety (unwindinganxiety.com). We’ve had a 40 per cent reduction in craving-related eating in one of our studies and we’ve had people riding out full-blown panic attacks. Mindfulness really works.”

OUTSOURCE SUPPORT

Accountability is essential when you’re trying to break a bad habit or create a new one, so find a group that will support you in moments of weakness, give you a gentle kick when you’re slacking off, pick you up when you fall and celebrate your victories with you. Whether it’s an online fitness community such as Fitocracy that helps you stay motivated through your squat challenge, a Facebook group for sugar quitters or a running group that meets once a week, the important thing is that they always have your back.

Stating your goals on social media can also help you remain accountable – as long as your social media connections are supportive. If you think your high school friends or your co-workers just won’t get it, you might want to restrict your posts to closed groups of like-minded people.

CALL ON THE EXPERTS

If you’ve repeatedly tried to break a habit and it’s causing you significant distress, a psychologist can help you unearth the deeper psychological issues behind them and help change your thought patterns through cognitive behavioural therapy. Mental health professionals who offer mindfulness training are less common, but the Australian Psychological Society can help you find one in your area.

Alternative approaches such as hypnotherapy can also be effective. “Hypnotherapy has a very high success rate in helping people break habits,” says Andrew Johnson (withandrewjohnson.com), a relaxation and coping skills coach. “It makes the habitual behaviour more conscious, and at the same time focuses the mind on the positive benefits of breaking the habit. When the behaviour changes, it seems natural and thus has a long-lasting, if not permanent, effect.” 