

How to...



HOW TO



Learn better habits

A five-point guide from leading lifestyle behaviour change specialist **Dr Heather McKee**

1 Start with your 'why'

When it comes to creating healthy habits we often start by imposing a goal on ourselves (lose weight, gain muscle, do x time in a race). But if you want to stick with the change, you have to find your own personally meaningful reasons to do so. These reasons are your 'why'. Ask yourself, "By pursuing this healthy habit, how do I want to feel? What does it help me achieve in my day?" If you can find your why, you can accomplish your 'how'.

2 Make it as easy as possible

When adopting a new habit, we tend to set too many big goals at once, which sets us up for failure. Instead of trying to do everything at once, why not focus on making one small change and doing that consistently? On my Bite Sized Habits course, people set themselves one goal each week – planning a healthy snack at

4pm to avoid the biscuit slump, or aiming to walk 100 more steps on each day. Each time you achieve it you get a sense of satisfaction and this spurs you on to stick with it. You can then step it up gradually over time.

3 Put your habit in context

If you do something at the same time in the same context each day, this can help make it a habit. You can do this by asking yourself when and where you are going to perform your habit this week. This makes it up to 90 per cent more likely that you will carry it out.

4 Plan for going off course – you're human, it's going to happen!

When it comes to habits, willpower is not our friend, planning is! A plan helps you anticipate triggers and figure out ways of dealing with them. If you eat in response

to stress, ask yourself, "Is there an alternative option here?" If you go to head out for a run but it's raining, ask yourself, "What alternative exercise can I do when this happens?"

5 Find joy

Why do we pound the treadmill when it's mind-numbingly boring? Because we think it's good for us – but it's not good for us if we can't stick with it. So, ask yourself, "What healthy habits do I like?" In order to stick to our healthy habits, we have to enjoy them.

Having studied health behaviour change psychology for 10 years, Heather supports businesses in designing wellness products and programmes that last. She also runs a Bite Sized Habits course for anyone looking to create lasting habit change.
drheathermckee.co.uk

Illustration Xeutong Wang/Folio Art