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Contents

Please Read This First	2
<i>Terms of Use</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Disclaimer.....</i>	<i>2</i>
Contents	3
About the Author	5
Introduction.....	6
What Are Habits?	7
Succeeding with New Habits	8
Getting The Most Benefit from our Habits	9
The Downside of Motivation	10
Small Habits for Quick Results	11
Chasing “Happy”	14
Self-talk Sabotage.....	15
The Sleep Solution.....	16
Triggers.....	18
Recognizing Triggers	19
Hacking a Habit.	21
<i>Changing a Bad Habit</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Improving a Good Habit.....</i>	<i>21</i>
We all Need These!.....	22
Hack Procrastination.....	24
<i>Not Good Enough.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Start Straight Away.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Boost Your Emotional Level.....</i>	<i>25</i>
Why we have Habits!	26

Tips about Habits..... 27

- Keep Control27*
- Small Steps Avoid Mistakes27*
- Finding Time for a Task.27*

Habits can Improve Your Sports Performance 28

- Visualization.....28*
- How Important Is Practice?28*
- Practice.....28*

Making a Habit of Success!..... 30

About the Author

Elliot Patterson tried many "self improvement" systems and theories.

Elliot said, "I was working a bit harder, longer and doing more study. But, even then, the results were usually disappointing."

Elliot said, "I was easily discouraged and found it difficult to complete the programs. I didn't have the motivation and not much spare time."

"I realized I was eating a lot of snacks so I decided to find a way to cut down."

"That was when I learned the power of habits!"

"I did not find it easy to turn off or even reduce the grip of those snacking sessions. I started looking for clues to help me hack the habits which were keeping me buying and eating stuff I knew was bad for me."

"I couldn't stick to the gym program and the fees were quite high."

But, I found some information about adjusting the snack habit and it worked."

Elliot said, "I wrote my book to show readers what can be done without fuss and easily fitted into an average person's daily life."

"I've got some ways that people can review what habits are running in their heads and how they can change some of the simpler ones or even develop new ones to help them improve their results in various areas."

"I am an ordinary person who asks their doctor about anything medical."

"I can't say that these techniques will work for everyone, but there are many people who are benefitting from them."

Elliot said, "My readers won't need a lot of time and there's almost no costs involved with these methods of adapting or creating simple habits."

"You can share the experience with your partner which makes it more interesting and enjoyable."

Introduction

All habits are a series of actions which achieve an outcome. For convenience, many people call those habits which help us improve our work and leisure activities "Good" habits and those which result in bad outcomes for our health, relationships or business activities "Bad" habits. So, that's how I'll refer to them in this book.

When we realize we are in the grip of a bad habit, we find it harder than we thought to change our behavior because the routine of actions involved is deep in our subconscious.

That can make us less confident and affect our willingness to improve in other areas of our lives.

But, I will share with you the simple ideas and methods which have helped me to improve my own life through curbing bad habits and developing new and better ones.

The ideas I share are not difficult and there are no costs involved.

Not everything will be equally useful for every reader but the methods have helped many people.

There is no magic pill which will make everything better by tomorrow.

Some techniques will seem too simple to be effective. But, they are stepping stones which can help you develop more confidence and make later, more difficult challenges easier to overcome.

Every habitual behavior has one or more triggers. They can vary for each person. I will help you to recognize your triggers and give you ways to erase or overcome the associated damaging habits.

I also share the steps you can use to plant a positive new habit today!

What Are Habits?

Habits are a series of actions which we do regularly to the point where the sequence (the habit) drives a groove in our brain.

Research suggests that perhaps 45% of our behavior is based on habits.

Habitual routines help us perform many tasks without focusing all our concentration on them.

Most people brush their teeth in a habitual way. If we have not learned to do it thoroughly, we can invite dental problems through repeated poor action.

Over time, the brain learns when to process this sequence and we can achieve it with less direct attention.

After developing a habit, we become so used to the procedure, it will become almost automatic. The cortex, our brain's high-power processor, passes routine control to our basal ganglia, which handles routine procedure and emotions.

The habit process is used to train people to perform routine tasks with minimum risk and high accuracy. Basic training in military groups teaches new enlisted personnel the proven systems for basic tasks.

They also value and use them for their weapons handling and daily procedures. The military practice these habits until they are automatic. That can save seconds in an emergency when lives are at risk.

We may not realize how often we are under the control of a habit, doing it or the effects of it.

Habits may be active or dormant.

If we stop doing a habit, usually because we've removed the trigger which activated it or connected another more beneficial habit to that trigger, the track containing the details stays in our brain. It may be re-activated again if we respond to a new trigger with the previous habitual behavior.

I will cover some ways to hack a habit later in the book.

Succeeding with New Habits



If you decide to start a new habit to improve your life, whether it's small or large, these steps will help you.

It's important to have a good reason for the new routine which will keep you focused. It might seem, "the right thing to do!" but is it something which you really want to do?

The less personal commitment you feel the more will-power you'll have to have for those times when you are feeling below-par for whatever reason.

If you take on a marathon-sized commitment with no previous experience, it will fail and you will be discouraged from trying another self-improvement routine.

The truth is that failure is not the end, just a set-back which does not mean you can't succeed at a similar task. Ask Thomas Edison who tried many designs before finding the successful light-bulb.

Small steps work best. I'll give more detail about that later in the book.

Plan Ahead. Go through what you need and write it down so you are not surprised later on.

Don't let an occasional lapse persuade you that you can't keep to the routine.

If the benefit to you (and perhaps your family or colleagues) is good enough reason to start, you can just try again.

Getting The Most Benefit from our Habits

This chapter focuses on habits which we want to get the most benefit from.

Having a clear idea of the benefits which we want from a habitual behavior will improve the outcome.

We will get some enthusiasm for handling the work involved after the goal is clear in our mind.

But, the improvement we see regularly from our carefully planned habits we created will give even more confidence to us.

If you can fit those habits into your regular routine, that will make everything easier to manage.

Don't become discouraged if improvements don't come as soon as you hoped or if the task is more difficult than you expected. These are common and you can usually get through them by reviewing the process, giving yourself more time to complete it, or reducing the amount of effort until you have gained some experience of the process.

The Downside of Motivation



Motivation is not enough by itself.

Motivation is often temporary. Unless there is more coming along regularly because of successes or the favorable input you are getting, motivation will reduce when there is pressure on us to stop doing what we are trying to do.

Our internal level of motivation ebbs and flows as we are involved in activities or with people about other matters through our day.

Some days, it can be very hard to feel motivated.

What if you are feeling motivated (influenced) by competing activities?

Doing the most worthwhile activity might just lose out to something which gives you instant gratification, like grabbing a drink and watching your favorite show on TV.

Motivation will fade after you have been doing something for a while if there is no actual reward up to that point.

I am not detracting from the power of motivation but your motivation must have a target within you. Often, people find motivation for things like giving up their snacks or exercising to a schedule which is increasingly more demanding and hard to keep up with.

When you are doing something which needs concentrated effort, you will probably need to use some willpower as well.

The chapter about using small habits will show you one way which can boost your willpower over a relatively short period with minimum effort and no expense!

Small Habits for Quick Results

Creating and maintaining new habits cannot be any easier than this!

Some of the points which discourage many people who want to use habits to improve some part of their lives are:

- Too much time and effort invested
- Disappointing results
- Hard to maintain enthusiasm
- Hard to find a half hour every day
- Lost motivation

I believe this method is a breakthrough which will fix those perceived problems for many people.

- ✓ You can fit the task into your day guaranteed!
- ✓ The results will be in line with effort
- ✓ You will probably get a boost of confidence!
- ✓ Enthusiasm is easy to maintain because you set the parameters.
- ✓ You need just a few minutes which any of us can spare.

Motivation may be needed to decide that you will try this way to improve something about your life. But, you will use willpower to keep going.

I have not yet found anyone that doesn't have enough willpower to give this a fair trial! But, you can also use any motivation which is appropriate.

There are two main variations of this type of habit development. You will probably find ways to tweak it to suit you more specifically.

You can do your routine any time that suits you if you have any required tools or equipment available.

This system is simple.

The other advantage is that you decide what level of effort to start with and

adjust it to fit your timetable each day.

Many people will start with one push-up or just run from one corner of their street to the other end of the block if the blocks are small. Some run even less – that's fine too! And, of course, walking and rollerblading are okay too!

One push-up will not tax anyone nor make them more muscular in a hurry. But, if you do that each day, you will find it relaxing and decide to do a few extra. That's also okay!

Starting with one is intended to ease you in to regular exercise. You can stick with one a day or boost it to, say, five when you have the time and inclination.

Over time, you will add more repetitions, but the discipline of the habit will actually condition you to do other exercises successfully later on.

A friend has some medical issues which she is working through.

A regular exercise routine is not suitable at this stage for her.

But, she can do simple exercises with a couple of soup cans for one minute.

They are lighter than the available weights. She exercises her arms and it helps her breathing as well.

On breathing, you could use a simple breathing meditation exercise as a habit.

When you start this system, you might want to add several more quick habits to your day.

That would tend to make it all seem a chore.

I suggest that you don't take on more than three different routines on the same day.

Then, you can increase the amount of work in any of them without tiring yourself.

The whole idea seemed silly when I first heard of it but it does suit many people.

It is best used for simple habit routines but it won't take much time if you want to use the idea with something that requires special equipment.

Again, don't use it with something which takes more than, say, a minute for the basic routine.

Chasing “Happy”

This chapter will help anyone that is feeling a lot of general gloom lately, wondering when or if they will ever be as happy as most of their friends. Some may think that their friends are happy all the time but that’s unlikely. We all face disappointments and even disasters both small and large as we go along.

Nobody is happy all the time. No, not even the three actual clowns that I know!

Happiness is a state we can be in, not somewhere we can live.

If we’re feeling a bit low on happiness, the best antidote is to find some happy people and let it rub off on you.

Get a puppy or a guppy! If money is tight, the fish is cheaper and so is its food!

Having a pet is interesting and they tend to help their owners relax.

One of the reported benefits from having a pet is that the time you spend looking after their needs and interacting with them helps to take your mind off yourself, which is full of worries.

Of course, the world is also full of worries but you can ignore them and enjoy your pet’s company.

Getting out into the wider community is another way to find people to interact with.

If you have skills or knowledge, you can share it through local adult education groups or find clubs where you can discuss your hobbies or other interests.

I’ve done a bit of volunteer work with different groups and always found the experience worthwhile. Helping others pays in many ways.

Self-talk Sabotage

You might be shocked to know that we all talk to ourselves.

Our subconscious feeds a steady commentary about our abilities and performance. The content reflects how we feel about our situation and abilities at the time.

It is continuous and unedited. Our subconscious accepts whatever we feed it through our thoughts.

If we are lacking self-confidence, the messages our subconscious absorbs are negative.

But, the messages affect our health and other systems. And we suffer more doubts and expect more disappointments.

Our mindset is less optimistic and so are the results we are likely to get.

We can use a couple of simple steps to revise the content of future messages.

Recognize that these messages are false. They were from a time when you didn't know how powerfully negative they could be.

You know they're untrue from successes you've had and feedback you get.

That will be enough to make a difference. But, we can also try to maintain that positive attitude in our own expectations and our interactions.

The Sleep Solution



When people are under pressure to achieve better results and have busy social schedules, they often try to even things up by getting up earlier and going to bed later after finishing the work they brought home.

This could be a temporary solution but it holds the seeds for

greater problems along the track.

Sleep is not just a break from your active day, it is the time when your body is refreshed, repaired, and your memory is given the information which you learned through the previous waking period.

If you hack some time away from that sleep time, some of the essential repairs and memory increments may be affected.

You will definitely start to build a sleep debt which your systems will have to claim back at some time.

Meanwhile your physical and mental resources will suffer.

The biggest problem is that your brain does its repair and refresh work in cycles. If there is not enough time to complete a particular cycle, something may not be done.

Sleep is valuable, and we can pay dearly when we trade it off for some extra waking time.

If you have been feeling tired or depressed, fixing your sleep may have an almost immediate benefit, depending on how much sleep debt you built up.

Sleeping during the day may give some temporary refreshment but those sessions are not usually long or comfortable enough for a complete sleep cycle to occur.

You can also improve your sleep experience and results by removing your work and multimedia gear from your bedroom.

Many people watch television or read a book before going to sleep.

But, engaging your brain just before sleep slows its ability of your body to start its sleep preparation.

This common misunderstanding about the value and importance of uninterrupted sleep is adding to the problems we get with our health and our relationships.

People are more tired from sleep loss and under more pressure in work and social situations, so more arguments and misunderstandings occur.

Triggers

A trigger causes an action.



The triggers which may start us performing a habit (learned sequence) might be emotional, physical, or caused by someone or something we encounter.

Some habits may have several possible triggers.

Triggers are everywhere.

A dog's wagging tail, a baby's smile or a cat's purr will trigger happy thoughts in most people.

Most advertising uses triggers which encourage us to think of their product when we're in a receptive state at a later time. The words, "Get 20% Off!" will have many shoppers checking out the offer.

If we are hungry, we could make a sandwich, but we recall an advertisement and their special offer from a pizza parlor!

The sales person asks. "Would you like a drink as well?" just after we smelled the aroma from our fresh pizza and we spend a few more dollars, although we may already have drinks at home.

Our habits are often linked to more than one trigger.

Recognizing Triggers

Triggers can be subtle or as blatant as a billboard sign

When you review the habits you are using and find any that are having a bad effect, you need to accurately pinpoint the triggers that start them running so that you can work out how to change or even remove them.



Triggers will include:

Odors: We are motivated to buy a burger from the fast-food store even though we are not really hungry.

The scent of the flowers at a florist and their professional display makes us think of our partners reaction or the effect their color and scent could have on our home.

The smell of coffee from a shop sets off a desire for more caffeine.

The smell of a cigarette will trigger the impulse to start smoking, but there are also many other factors at work there.

Sounds:

You've probably heard of Pavlov who experimented on controlling the salivation of dogs with a bell that usually signaled they were about to be fed.

We are also likely to have habits which respond to sounds.

Location

If you work where there is a **canteen**, you may buy something for lunch and maybe also for a later snack *even if you brought food from home*.

If there is a coffee machine or a water-cooler, you'll stay for a chat, to unwind after your commute and also to interact with your colleagues even if you are near a deadline.

Time of day: Feeling tired after you reach your workplace, you'll chat with colleagues or check your email before starting your regular work.

Mood: Our emotional state is often a trigger for our habits.

When we are tired, we may get a cup of coffee to perk us up, even if it's near bed-time.

If we are feeling worried, we may grab some comfort food. The effect of high-sugar, high-fat snacks is likely to show on our waist-line and result in more worry!

Boredom is one of the most common causes of snack-eating or cigarette sessions. The answer is easy; do something interesting which engages our mind and our hands!

People: Role models and popular personalities: When we see actors using products such as alcohol or cigarettes, we are likely to adapt those products.

When we are with friends that are smoking, we may start smoking ourselves.

Hacking a Habit.

I've detailed some methods of recognizing our habits and reviewing their good or bad effects on us.

We also need to consider the effects of our actions on those around us.

Here are the short version of the most common ways of adapting simple habits.

Those which have deep emotional aspects should be referred to your medical professional. Self-treatment of those conditions may cause worse effects.

Changing a Bad Habit

When you want to stop doing a habit, you might want to try changing your accustomed response to the trigger.

Or, you might try eliminating the trigger from your daily activities.

Improving a Good Habit

When you have a good habit you want to change, so that it gives even better results, you can focus on changing some steps in the habit while leaving the trigger as it is.

This is often more effective and less stressful than trying to add a new habit to the same trigger.

We all Need These!

We all have some basic needs which we seek through our lives. If we cannot get enough of any of these, we are likely to feel some unhappiness or even pain.

Their absence can make us feel despair and helpless or push us toward getting what we feel is lacking.

The importance of these needs is accepted even by those who question parts of Mr. Maslow's conclusions.

Knowing about them will help you recognize those which are most important to you at different stages of your life and career. That will help you to make better decisions about how you structure your habits, including triggers and rewards.

Many of our learned habits are developed to provide something which will fulfill one or more of these needs.

The basic needs and their importance to all humans have been described by Abraham Maslow in a 1943 paper.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs are usually shown in a pyramid form.

The most important group are ***physiological***.

Water, food and air are critical needs for humans and almost all other creatures. For us, clothing and shelter are also in this section. If we cannot get these for ourselves, we cannot succeed in life and may even die.

Security is the next level of requirements. This includes personal safety and extends to security of our property, employment, environment etc.

Love/Emotional attachments are the next most critical level of needs. Our family and others with whom we have an attachment or interact with. This can also include our connections and interaction with religious and community groups.

Esteem is the next level. This includes the desire to achieve on a personal and professional level and be recognized for that and any other contributions.

Self Actualization: This is the drive to know your own potential skills and abilities and to realize them. This was set as the highest level by Maslow but was downgraded by many critics of his theory. Recent research has found that even people who are in circumstances where they struggle to meet their basic needs still rate self actualization very important as Maslow suggested.

Please note: These needs can produce positive or negative impulses in people.

Where someone feels they lack in one of the areas they believe is important to them, they may try to punish those they believe responsible or steal from those who have what they need.

But, other people in similar circumstances can use the perceived lack as a motivator for positive action to fill the lack.

Hack Procrastination

"I am going to tackle my procrastination tomorrow," won't work.

I've included these tips about procrastination because it is a habitual behavior.

Procrastination stops many people from achieving their dreams and makes life less pleasant for their families and colleagues.

These tips have brought some relief to myself and others.

They're not difficult, expensive or demanding much of your already scarce time!

Review the tasks which you are finding difficult to start.

You will probably have reasons for these delays but they are not as important as the task if you weren't focused on other things.

Finish any of the tasks which can be done now.

Set the other tasks into your schedule for today.

If there are there any tasks which are still delayed, examine your reason for delaying the task?

Not Good Enough

Sometimes we fear that we might get a negative reaction to the quality of our work.

This may hold us back from starting a project or cause us to keep tweaking it because it is never quite perfect.

To get past that and do the task, decide to do the best you can with your current skills, seek feedback, and review similar work from other people.

Then, start to look for ways to boost your confidence level by reviewing previous successes and positive feedback you have got.

I read an interview of a famous writer who, like so many others, had many rejections before achieving lasting success. She was asked if she has ever thought of giving up when the rejections were coming in.

She said, "I did for a little while. But, I has a low-paying job and there were few others around then. So, I decided to use the rejections as a spur. I got determined to prove them wrong. With that mindset, I read the notes each morning before I started typing more stories. My strong desire to prove I was a good writer kept me going and I started getting acceptances shortly after that."

Apart from being an example of motivation, it's also an example of the power of the desire for Self Actualization that Maslow put at the top of his Hierarchy of Needs!

Start Straight Away

Recent research has indicated that we will get started more confidently if we start within two minutes of making the commitment, verbally or in writing.

When we start to review the decision at this critical point, we put a temporary block in our mind and we can begin to go off the boil (lose interest).

If it is a long or very low priority task, just start on the first part of it. I usually find that I get into the task and keep on until it is completed rather than have to put the materials aside safely and retrieve them later when I might have several more important tasks to do!

Boost Your Emotional Level

If you feel too down to start a task, give yourself a couple of minutes of a favorite meditation track. The delay in starting the task then may be more than made up because of your increased pace.

Why we have Habits!

Researchers say that habits are good for us when the results are positive.

It was explained to me that the brain has a part called the basal ganglia which controls emotions and movements.

When the routine is in place, the brain can start to reduce its focus on the actions. This allows you to use that extra reasoning power for other duties while the habit routine is performed.

A much greater benefit is that we avoid the penalty which procrastinating demands in stress, poor reputation and tiredness.

The latter may seem strange. But, it is true that we become more tired from delaying work than it would probably result from getting it done straight away!

Let's hack a habit routine to deal with the next task we're tempted to put off or even put away out of sight.

We just need to know the result expected, the materials and effort required and the time frame.

We also need to ensure that we overcome any desire to do something else first or even take a break.

Tips about Habits

Keep Control

Habits are helpful but we must keep the ability to monitor and over-ride them when they are possibly putting us at risk.

This includes driving a vehicle, listening to your smart device while walking around and any other task which can turn bad in a wink!

Small Steps Avoid Mistakes

One of the most important things with habits is to make any changes only after you have reviewed all the parts of it and thought about the effects of each change.

If you make changes to more than one action in the routine of a habit and then have a problem, you will not be sure which of the changes caused it.

Finding Time for a Task.

If you want to do a task which you cannot find time for, try doing it in small pieces. Set aside just five minutes and start immediately. When the time is up, you can put the project aside until you have another five minutes or continue while you are feeling good about it.

This way, you will get a boost to your productivity and your self-confidence.

Habits can Improve Your Sports Performance

Visualization

It is claimed that many sports stars create mental images of themselves doing particular maneuvers faultlessly and review them often.

The theory is that the mental image they focus on can help improve the results they get from their regular practice.

How Important Is Practice?

"If I miss one day of practice, I notice. If I miss two days of practice, the orchestra notices. If I miss three days of practice, the audience notices!"

Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Polish Pianist

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

Aristotle

Practice

I mentioned earlier how military services train the recruits on basic procedures and standard military duties, including weapons handling to the point where many of these activities become habitual.

Practice as well as actual performance are required to keep these actions fast and accurate.

Sports people also practice many of their basic activities to the point where they are habitual.

And, they continue practicing regularly. This gives them the ability to let their basal ganglia handle the routine actions and they can watch for any possible advantage in the current situation.

Some practice their basic skills to the point where they are habitual, then focus on speed of execution.

Others, like golfers, don't need more speed, so they focus on refining their techniques.

Athletes are encouraged by coaches to look for lessons when they make a

mistake or are defeated. But, then they usually try to forget it and focus on previous successes and current goals.

Spending more time looking at or thinking about failures may carry the risk that they might repeat the faulty action another time.

Or, it could reduce the high level of self-confidence which is an important part of their make-up.

Making a Habit of Success!



When you know and control the habits you have, you are able to make the most of your abilities and the opportunities which come your way, both personally and professionally.

Thank you for reading my book. I know the tips here can help you improve aspects of your life and be more confident in the future.

Elliot Patterson

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