

7 steps to achieve change from [Leo Babauta](#)

1. **Do a 30-day challenge, focusing on just ONE habit.**
 - In my experience, it takes about 30 days to change a habit, if you're focused and consistent.
 - Your challenge: stick with a habit every day for 30 days, and post your daily progress updates to a forum.
 - Start small. The smaller the better. Want to exercise? Start with just 5-10 minutes. Want to wake up earlier? Try just 10 minutes earlier for now
2. **Write it out on paper, along with your motivations, obstacles, and strategies for overcoming them.**
 - Just saying you're going to change the habit is not enough of a commitment. You need to actually write it down, on paper. Write what habit you're going to change.
 - While you're writing, also write down a plan. This will ensure you're really prepared. The plan should include your reasons (motivations) for changing, obstacles, triggers, support buddies, and other ways you're going to make this a success.
 - Know your motivations, and be sure they're strong. You have to be very clear why you're doing this, and the benefits of doing it need to be clear in your head.
3. **Commit fully in a public way.**
 - Tell everyone about your quit date or start date. Put it up on your wall or computer desktop. Make this a Big Day. It builds up anticipation and excitement, and helps you to prepare.
4. **Log your progress each day.**
 - In your plan, write down a start date. Maybe a week or two from the date you start writing out the plan.
 - Remind yourself of your commitment hourly, and at the beginning and end of each day. Read your plan. Celebrate your success. Prepare yourself for obstacles and urges.
5. **Have support for when you falter — either in real life or online. Who will you turn to when you have a strong urge?**
 - Write these people into your plan.
 - Get your family and friends and co-workers to support you. Ask them for their help, and let them know how important this is.
6. **Reward every little success.**
 - Give yourself regular rewards. Put these into your plan, along with the milestones at which you'll receive them.
7. **If you fail, figure out what went wrong, plan for it, and try again.**
 - Don't let failure and guilt stop you. They're just obstacles, but they can be overcome. In fact, if you learn from each failure, they become stepping stones to your success. Regroup. Let go of guilt. Learn. Plan. And get back on that horse.

Tips to change behaviors/habits

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- Do a 30-day challenge, focusing on just ONE habit.
- Write it out on paper, along with your motivations, obstacles, and strategies for overcoming them.
- Commit fully, in a public way.
- Log your progress.
- Remain publicly accountable — report on your progress each day.
- Have support for when you falter — either in real life or online.
- Reward every little success.
- If you fail, figure out what went wrong, plan for it, and try again

The Habit Change Guide sheet: 29 Ways to Successfully Ingrain a Behavior

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

Our daily lives are often a series of habits played out through the day, a trammelled existence fettered by the slow accretion of our previous actions.

But habits can be changed, as difficult as that may seem sometimes.

Keep it simple

The simple steps of habit change:

1. Write down your plan.
2. Identify your triggers and replacement habits.
3. Focus on doing the replacement habits every single time the triggers happen, for about 30 days.

More details: .

1. Do just one habit at a time. Extremely important. Habit change is difficult, even with just one habit. If you do more than one habit at a time, you're setting yourself up for failure. Keep it simple, allow yourself to focus, and give yourself the best chance for success. Btw, this is why New Year's resolutions often fail — people try to tackle more than one change at a time.

2. Start small. The smaller the better, because habit change is difficult, and trying to take on too much is a recipe for disaster. Want to exercise? Start with just 5-10 minutes. Want to wake up earlier? Try just 10 minutes earlier for now. Or consider [half habits](#).

3. Do a 30-day Challenge. In my experience, it takes about 30 days to change a habit, if you're focused and consistent. This is a round number and will vary from person to person and habit to habit. Often you'll read a magical "21 days" to change a habit, but this is a myth with no evidence. Seriously — try to find the evidence from a scientific study for this. A more recent study shows that 66 days is a better number ([read more](#)). But 30 days is a good number to get you started. Your challenge: stick with a habit every day for 30 days, and post your daily progress updates to a forum.

4. Write it down. Just saying you're going to change the habit is not enough of a commitment. You need to actually write it down, on paper. Write what habit you're going to change.

5. Make a plan. While you're writing, also write down a plan. This will ensure you're really prepared. The plan should include your reasons (motivations) for changing, obstacles, triggers, support buddies, and other ways you're going to make this a success. More on each of these below.

6. Know your motivations, and be sure they're strong. Write them down in your plan. You have to be very clear why you're doing this, and the benefits of doing it need to be clear in your head. If you're just doing it for vanity, while that can be a good motivator, it's not usually enough. We need something stronger. For me, I quit smoking for my wife and kids. I made a promise to them. I knew if I didn't smoke, not only would they be without a husband and father, but they'd be more likely to smoke themselves (my wife was a smoker and quit with me).

7. Don't start right away. In your plan, write down a start date. Maybe a week or two from the date you start writing out the plan. When you start right away (like today), you are not giving the plan the seriousness it deserves. When you have a "Quit Date" or "Start Date", it gives that date an air of significance. Tell everyone about your quit date (or start date). Put it up on your wall or computer desktop. Make this a Big Day. It builds up anticipation and excitement, and helps you to prepare.

8. Write down all your obstacles. If you've tried this habit change before (odds are you have), you've likely failed. Reflect on those failures, and figure out what stopped you from succeeding. Write down every obstacle that's happened to you, and others that are likely to happen. Then write down how you plan to overcome them. That's the key: write down your solution *before* the obstacles arrive, so you're prepared.

9. Identify your triggers. What situations trigger your current habit? For the smoking habit, for example, triggers might include waking in the morning, having coffee, drinking alcohol, stressful meetings, going out with friends, driving, etc. Most habits have multiple triggers. Identify all of them and write them in your plan.

10. For every single trigger, identify a positive habit you're going to do instead. When you first wake in the morning, instead of smoking, what will you do? What about when you get stressed? When you go out with friends? Some positive habits could include: exercise, meditation, deep breathing, organizing, decluttering, and more.

11. Plan a support system. Who will you turn to when you have a strong urge? Write these people into your plan. Support forums online are a great tool as well — I used a smoking cessation forum on about.com when I quit smoking, and it really helped. Don't underestimate the power of support — it's really important.

12. Ask for help. Get your family and friends and co-workers to support you. Ask them for their help, and let them know how important this is. Find an AA group in your area. Join online forums where people are trying to quit. When you have really strong urges or a really difficult time, call on your support network for help. Don't smoke a cigarette, for example, without posting to your online quit forum. Don't have a drop of alcohol before calling your AA buddy.

13. Become aware of self-talk. You talk to yourself, in your head, all the time — but often we're not aware of these thoughts. Start listening. These thoughts can derail any habit change, any goal. Often they're negative: "I can't do this. This is too difficult. Why am I putting myself through this? How bad is this for me anyway? I'm not strong enough. I don't have enough discipline. I suck." It's important to know you're doing this.

14. Stay positive. You will have negative thoughts — the important thing is to realize when you're having them, and push them out of your head. Squash them like a bug! Then replace them with a positive thought. "I can do this! If Leo can do it, so can I!" :)

15. Have strategies to defeat the urge. Urges are going to come — they're inevitable, and they're strong. But they're also temporary, and beatable. Urges usually last about a minute or two, and they come in waves of varying strength. You just need to ride out the wave, and the urge will go away. Some strategies for making it through the urge: deep breathing, self-massage, eat some frozen grapes, take a walk, exercise, drink a glass of water, call a support buddy, post on a support forum.

16. Prepare for the saboteurs. There will always be people who are negative, who try to get you to do your old habit. Be ready for them. Confront them, and be direct: you don't need them to try to sabotage you, you need their support, and if they can't support you then you don't want to be around them.

17. Talk to yourself. Be your own cheerleader, give yourself pep talks, repeat your mantra (below), and don't be afraid to seem crazy to others. We'll see who's crazy when you've changed your habit and they're still lazy, unhealthy slobs!

18. Have a mantra. For quitting smoking, mine was "Not One Puff Ever" (I didn't make this up, but it worked — more on this below). When I wanted to quit my day job, it was "Liberate Yourself". This is just a way to remind yourself of what you're trying to do.

19. Use visualization. This is powerful. Vividly picture, in your head, successfully changing your habit. Visualize doing your new habit after each trigger, overcoming urges, and what it will look like when you're done. This seems new-agey, but it really works.

20. Have rewards. Regular ones. You might see these as bribes, but actually they're just positive feedback. Put these into your plan, along with the milestones at which you'll receive them.

21. Take it one urge at a time. Often we're told to take it one day at a time — which is good advice — but really it's one urge at a time. Just make it through this urge.

22. Not One Puff Ever (in other words, no exceptions). This seems harsh, but it's a necessity: when you're trying to break the bonds between an old habit and a trigger, and form a new bond between the trigger and a new habit, you need to be really consistent. You can't do it sometimes, or there will be no new bond, or at least it will take a really really long time to form. So, at least for the first 30 days (and preferably 60), you need to have no exceptions. Each time a trigger happens, you need to do the new habit and not the old one. No exceptions, or you'll have a backslide. If you do mess up, regroup, learn from your mistake, plan for your success, and try again (see the last item on this list).

23. Get rest. Being tired leaves us vulnerable to relapse. Get a lot of rest so you can have the energy to overcome urges.

24. Drink lots of water. Similar to the item above, being dehydrated leaves us open to failure. Stay hydrated!

25. Renew your commitment often. Remind yourself of your commitment hourly, and at the beginning and end of each day. Read your plan. Celebrate your success. Prepare yourself for obstacles and urges.

26. Set up public accountability. Blog about it, post on a forum, email your commitment and daily progress to friend and family, post a chart up at your office, write a column for your local newspaper (I did this when I ran my first marathon). When we make it public — not just the commitment but the progress updates — we don't want to fail.

28. Avoid some situations where you normally do your old habit, at least for awhile, to make it a bit easier on yourself. If you normally drink when you go out with friends, consider not going out for a little while. If you normally go outside your office with co-workers to smoke, avoid going out with them. This applies to any bad habit — whether it be eating junk food or doing drugs, there are some situations you can avoid that are especially difficult for someone trying to change a bad habit. Realize, though, that when you go back to those situations, you will still get the old urges, and when that happens you should be prepared.

29. If you fail, figure out what went wrong, plan for it, and try again. Don't let failure and guilt stop you. They're just obstacles, but they can be overcome. In fact, if you learn from each

failure, they become stepping stones to your success. Regroup. Let go of guilt. Learn. Plan. And get back on that horse.

The 3 R's of Habit Change --from James Clear

Every habit you have — good or bad — follows the same 3-step pattern.

1. Reminder (the trigger that initiates the behavior)
2. Routine (the behavior itself; the action you take)
3. Reward (the benefit you gain from doing the behavior)

The best way to do this is to set what I call “macro goals” and “micro quotas.” By Gregory Ciotti

- *Goals* should be the big picture items that you wish to someday accomplish.
- Your *quotas* on the other hand are the minimum amounts of work that you **must** get done every single day to make it a reality.

Specific to weight loss/exercise:

- Don't engage in other activities while eating such as watching T.V. driving, reading, or talking on the phone

- Concentrate on the pleasures of the food you eat - the sight, the smell, and the taste. Don't allow eating to be a mindless, unconscious behavior.
- Choose one room for eating, and don't eat while standing or walking around. Sit at a table and make it attractive.
- Spend at least 20 minutes eating your meals to allow your brain to trigger a fullness sensation to your stomach. Take small bites or even try chopsticks!
- Don't always leave a clean plate. Pay more attention to your hunger. It's OK to leave something if you feel satisfied before you're finished. Put it away for tomorrow if you want.
- If you can't eat "just one" of certain foods, don't buy that food.
- Don't go grocery shopping on an empty stomach, and shop from a prepared list.
- Buy foods that require preparation. Ready-to-eat foods that you desire will constantly call your name.
- Incorporate small bouts of exercise into your daily routine. Try taking the stairs, parking far away, walking to the grocery store, or hand-washing your car.