A Guide to Changing Habits

What is a habit?
A habit is a behavior that starts as a choice, and then becomes a nearly unconscious pattern. It often takes place in a loop, known as a habit loop. Once you understand the loop, you can change habits.

3 Basic Steps of Habit Loop (Duhigg, 2012)
*When I see my CUE, I will do my ROUTINE in order to get a REWARD*

Cue
The cue is a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode. The cue can be internal, such as a feeling or thought, or external, such as a time of day, person, action, or the company of certain people.

Routine
The routine can be physical, cognitive, or emotional.

Reward
The reward determines if a particular habit loop is worth remembering. The behavioral pattern will become automatic when your brain *craves* the reward.

Examples of a Habit Loop

Habit of grabbing coffee on the go
- Cue - Pass by Starbucks on the way to class. You did not have time to make coffee or breakfast before leaving
- Routine - Grab a quick breakfast and coffee
- Reward - Caffeine/sustenance and ease of getting it even if it is outside of your budget and may cause you to be late to work/school

Habit of eating donuts
- Cue - I see a box of donuts in the break room at work
- Routine - Eat a donut just because it is there
- Reward - Easy sugar and dopamine hit even if I am not hungry at the time

Habit of too much Social Media
- Cue - End of a long day of work/school
- Routine - Watch social media mindlessly for hours and delaying bedtime
- Reward - Relaxation and entertainment even if it means sacrificing sleep

Now that you are aware of what a habit loop is, you can work on creating a habit and changing a habit. Attached on the next pages are 2 flow charts with steps on how to change a habit or how to create a habit.

References
HOW TO CREATE A HABIT

DO YOU WANT TO CREATE A HABIT?

Yes

WHAT BEHAVIOR DO YOU WANT TO CREATE?

YOUR NEW HABIT

THE CUE

Step 1
Every habit has a trigger.

What time will this habit occur?

Where will you be?

Who else will be around?

What will you have just finished?

What emotion do you think you will be feeling?

You don't need all of these to create a habit. ONLY ONE OF THEM IS NEEDED TO BECOME A CUE.

THE REWARD

Step 2
What reward will you give yourself at the end of the behavior?

Do you actually enjoy this reward?

Yes

No

Do you crave this reward when you are exposed to the cue?

Yes

No

After a few days, ask yourself: do you crave the intrinsic reward of the habit (how it makes you feel) more than the extrinsic reward (what you give yourself as a treat)?

Yes

No

After two weeks, ask yourself: do you crave the intrinsic reward of the habit (how it makes you feel) more than the extrinsic reward (what you give yourself as a treat)?

Yes

No

YOU'VE GOT A POWERFUL HABIT!

THE ROUTINE

Step 3

NOW PUT IT ALL TOGETHER.

Routine

This is the behavior you want to become a habit.

Cue

From Step 1

Reward

From Step 2

Studies show that the easiest way to implement a new habit is to write a plan:

When ________, I will ________ because ________

CUE

From Step 1

it provides me with ________

ROUTINE

From Step 2

REWARD

From Step 2

Post this plan where you will see it. Try it for a week.

Eventually, outside your, the new behavior will become automatic.
HOW TO CHANGE A HABIT

DO YOU WANT TO CHANGE A HABIT?

Yes

THE HABIT YOU WANT TO CHANGE

DIAGNOSE THE THREE PARTS OF THE HABIT

THE CUE

When you feel the urge for your habit, ask yourself:

What time is it?

Where are you?

Who else is around?

What did you just do?

What emotion are you feeling?

ONE OF THESE 5 THINGS IS THE CUE.
Look for which one stays the same every time you feel the urge.

THE REWARD

What craving do you think your habit is satisfying?

TEST THAT THEORY:

Substitute another reward (e.g., instead of eating a cookie, have a cup of coffee.)

Is the craving gone?

THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE REALLY CRAVING.

YES

NO

Substitute the opposite reward (e.g., instead of eating a cookie, take a walk.)

Is the craving gone?

Keep experimenting until you find something new that satisfies the urge.

THE ROUTINE

New that you have identified the cue and reward.

INSERT A NEW ROUTINE.

Routine

Cue

Reward

Your new habit is:

When I will... because

it provides me with

Post this plan where you will see it. Try it for a week.
Eventually, habits say the new behavior will become automatic.

Quit reading this flowchart.