

WELL BALANCED

- JANUARY 2026 -

National Staying Healthy Month



The new year often brings a renewed sense of energy and motivation, especially when it comes to health and wellness goals. January is National Staying Healthy Month, a reminder to prioritize sustainable habits that can support a healthy, balanced lifestyle. Habits are learned behaviors that shape daily life and overall well-being. While it's often said that it takes 21 days to form a habit, in fact, research suggests that it actually takes 66 days. Understanding how habits form can help us create positive routines and break unhelpful ones.

At the core of every habit is a cycle, but not all habits develop the same way. Some habits form actively through repetition (*active habits*), while others develop passively through exposure and environment (*passive habits*).

Habits don't form randomly. They follow a predictable cycle known as the *habit loop*. While there are several ways to describe it, the habit loop often includes these three key components:

- **Stimulus:** The trigger that cues the behavior
- **Behavior:** The action or routine itself
- **Reward:** The benefit or satisfaction gained from completing the behavior.



Reminder

Although the new year serves as the traditional time to set resolutions, make goals, and commit to healthy habits, you can make positive change at any time throughout the year!

Here's how the habit loop can be applied to the development of a simple habit, such as teeth brushing.

	Learning to Brush Your Teeth	Brushing Your Teeth Habitually
Stimulus	Parent or guardian prompting you to brush morning and night	Morning, night, or the desire for fresh breath
Behavior	Brushing your teeth with support	Brushing your teeth independently
Reward	Earning a sticker	A clean mouth and fresh breath

Over time, the stimulus has slightly changed, but it still exists; the behavior remains the same, and the reward has become more intrinsic (personally motivating) than extrinsic (externally motivating).

The habit loop can be used to not only establish new, healthy habits but also to break old habits that may not be supporting the health and wellness goals you aim to achieve or maintain. To break negative habits, consider these strategies:

- **Identify unhelpful routines:** Notice the habits that may be holding you back from your goals. For example, staying up late on your phone might make it hard to get out of bed in the morning and leave you feeling low on energy during the day.
- **Recognize triggers:** Become aware of cues that prompt those unhelpful habits and find ways to reduce your exposure. In this case,

charging your phone next to your bed can make late-night screen time more tempting.

- **Find positive alternatives:** Swap old behaviors for healthier, more supportive routines, rather than just removing them altogether. For example, try reading a book instead of watching videos on your phone before bed.

Committing to a behavior change isn't always easy. Many people start with big goals and high motivation, only to lose momentum and burn out before reaching their desired outcome. To help prevent this, consider incorporating the following tips when building your habit plan.

- **Start small:** Be realistic about what's achievable so you can build your confidence as you progress.
- **Plan for setbacks:** Setbacks are normal. Being flexible and having a backup plan is key to staying on track!
- **Incorporate habit stacking:** Add a new habit onto one you already do to build consistency. For example, if you want to increase your



Did You Know?

Not all habits are formed mindfully. Some develop in response to internal or external stressors and can become negative or unhealthy over time. For example, you might reach for your phone the moment your alarm goes off to check work emails—a habit often fueled by stress or pressure from work.

flexibility, you might try stretching for ten minutes after brushing your teeth each morning and night to make stretching a consistent habit.

- **Set goals and make them SMART:**

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-Bound.

- **Celebrate your progress:** Big or small, celebrate your success along the way to stay motivated!

Sustainable behavior change isn't about perfection, and it doesn't happen all at once. Real change comes when healthy habits become a natural part of your everyday life.

Resources

- » National Staying Healthy Month (nationaltoday.com)

Sources

- » <https://positivepsychology.com/how-habits-are-formed>
- » <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention-type-2/new-healthy-habits.html>
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