UNIT 5 | TOPIC 2

BE THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF: KEY PROTECTIVE APPROACHES FOR TAKING CARE OF YOUR WELLBEING

TOPIC

02

BUILDING HEALTHY HABITS

This topic explores the concept of habit formation and its profound impact on managing stress in the workplace. It emphasizes the importance of understanding cues, routines, and rewards in shaping behaviors, promoting healthy habits, and fostering a productive and balanced work environment.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

THIS TOPIC IS DESIGNED AROUND THE FOLLOWING MAIN LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

01

Understanding Habit Formation for Stress Management

Explore how habits contribute to managing stress and why developing healthy habits is crucial for overall well-being.

03

Exploring the Cue-Routine- Reward Loop

Discover how the Cue-Routine-Reward loop influences habit formation and its practical implications in daily life.

05

Understanding the Psychological and Neurological Aspects of Habit Formation

Understand how habits are formed in the brain and the role of neuroplasticity in changing behaviors

02

Differentiating Between Healthy and Unhealthy Workplace Habits

Identify examples of both healthy and unhealthy workplace habits to enhance productivity and wellbeing.

04

Applying Strategies for Habit Modification

Learn practical steps to modify existing habits by understanding cues, experimenting with rewards, and creating effective plans.

06

Promoting a Growth Mindset for Habit Development

Explore the concept of a growth mindset and its importance in adopting and sustaining new habits

07

Implementing Practical Techniques for Habit Development

Apply practical activities such as habit-reversal training and mindfulness to develop healthier habits in their daily routines

09

Reflecting on Personal Habit-Related Challenges and Solutions

Reflect on personal habit challenges and develop personalized strategies to overcome them based on learned concepts.

80

Evaluating the Timeframe and Persistence Required for Habit Formation

Evaluate the timeframe and importance of persistence in forming habits, debunking the myth of the "21-day rule."

10

Applying Habit Formation Principles in Professional Settings

Apply habit formation principles to enhance performance, reduce stress, and foster a healthier workplace environment.

COMPETENCES

THIS TRAINING CONTENT IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU ACQUIRE THE FOLLOWING COMPETENCES:

- Adaptability: Understand how to adapt to changes in their habits and environments, fostering resilience against stress and promoting healthier behaviors.
- O2 **Communication:** Enhance skills in effectively receiving and utilizing feedback at the workplace, fostering constructive dialogue and mutual understanding.
- **Decision Making:** Develop skills in identifying habit-related issues, comparing strategies for habit change, and making informed decisions to improve personal and professional well-being.
- O4 **Empathy:** Through understanding their own and others' habits and stress responses, learners will enhance their empathy and ability to support others in adopting healthier habits.
- O5 **Initiative:** Take proactive steps towards habit modification and stress management, going beyond basic requirements to achieve personal and professional goals.
- **Resilience:** Build resilience by managing stress effectively through habit modification, enabling learners to recover quickly from difficulties and maintain productivity.
- **Self-regulation:** Learn strategies to manage their own habits and stress responses, enhancing self-regulation in both personal and professional contexts.

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION OF THE TERM "HEALTHY HABITS"

The essence of habits

For thousands of years now, humans have evolved to respond to stress with mechanisms originally intended to protect us from immediate dangers, such predators. Although such primal are not of immediate threats importance in modern life, it still presents us with a plethora of that can significantly stressors impact our physical and mental well-being. Daily challenges, including work pressures, financial concerns, and personal relationships, continuously trigger our responses. This constant activation can lead to chronic stress, which adversely affects our health.

Therefore, it is vital not only to comprehend the nature of stress but also to cultivate effective, healthy habits to manage it successfully. Throughout this course you will find many suggestions how to do that and moreover, help you greatly enhance your ability to cope with stress. ensuring to maintain balanced and healthier lifestyle amidst the demands of contemporary living.



What is a habit?

Scientists say habits are actions we do regularly without thinking. They can be triggered by our surroundings, like where we are, the time of day, or how we feel. These can be small actions like twirling your hair when stressed or bigger ones like staying up late or making coffee every morning. If you do something a lot without much thought, it's probably a habit.

Habits form because our brains find them helpful. For example, if you tap your foot after reading a stressful email, it distracts you from your stress. This feels good because it releases dopamine, a chemical in the brain that makes us feel pleasure and helps rewire our brain connections. making the habit stronger.

Your brain then links the habit to other things, like being at your desk, so soon just sitting there makes you want to tap your foot, even without stress. These habit loops of cueaction-reward happen quickly, often before you even realize it, which can be good because not all habits are bad.

Habits save us time and mental energy by letting us act quickly based on what worked before. One study found that people spend over 40% of their day doing repeated actions while thinking about other things. For example,

morning routines become automatic and efficient. But sometimes. habits become unhelpful. Just wanting to change them usually isn't Understanding how habits work can help you make better plans to change them. Since habits are triggered by certain environments or routines, changing these can help break a habit. For instance, lying in bed might make you scroll on your phone, or watching TV might make you crave snacks.



Changing your surroundings routines, like moving or starting a new job, can help. An older (2005) study showed that university students' habits changed a lot when they moved to a new school. For habits like foot tapping, psychologists suggest habit-reversal training, which replaces a bad habit with a better one. This means understanding when you do the habit and planning a different action. For example, keep a stress ball at your desk if you tap your foot when stressed, and use the ball instead.



Equally important is replacing unhealthy habits, such as excessive screen time or poor dietary choices, with positive behaviors to reinforce your resilience against stress. Embedding healthy habits into our daily lives, can truly help us create a foundation for sustained well-being and better manage the ongoing challenges of modern life and especially stress.

Habits are individual

Everyone handles stress in their own way. You might know some friends who seem perpetually calm and others who become anxious more quickly. This variation is entirely normal, as stress responses are heavily influenced by our unique genetics, experiences and life circumstances. Same goes for habits. Confucius said that the nature of men is always the same. It is their habits that separate them.

While it can be tempting to manage stress through temporary reliefs like overeating, medication and more destructive ones like alcohol and drugs, it's crucial to build your very own healthy stress management habits. It is important to find and practice more effective techniques that work for you *personally* and help you cope with stress in a healthy manner.

Your body is a temple. Choose to take care of it adequately. Start now. Do not procrastinate. Be persistent.

HEALTHY VS. BAD HABITS AT THE WORKPLACE

It is more than likely, that you can already make a difference between healthy and bad habits. However, can you recognise them in your work routine as well? Forming healthy habits and breaking unhealthy ones in the workplace are critical strategies for managing stress and preventing burnout. Let's have a look at some examples and check your awareness:



HEALTHY HABITS:

- Taking Regular Breaks
- Staying Hydrated
- Organizing Your Workspace
- Practicing Mindfulness
- Prioritizing Tasks
- Maintaining Good Posture
- Healthy Eating
- Setting Boundaries
- Seeking Feedback

UNHEALTHY HABITS:

- Multitasking
- Skipping Breaks
- Poor Time Management
- Unhealthy Eating
- Poor Communication
- Neglecting Personal Health
- Overtime/Overworking
- Disorganization
- Complaining/gossiping
- Ignoring Feedback

THE SCIENCE OF HABITS: HOW HABITS ARE FORMED

Understanding the Cue-Routine-Reward Loop

The process of habit formation is well-explained through the Cue-Routine-Reward loop, a concept popularized by Charles Duhigg in his book "The Power of Habit". This loop consists of three essential components:

- the cue
- the routine and
- the reward.

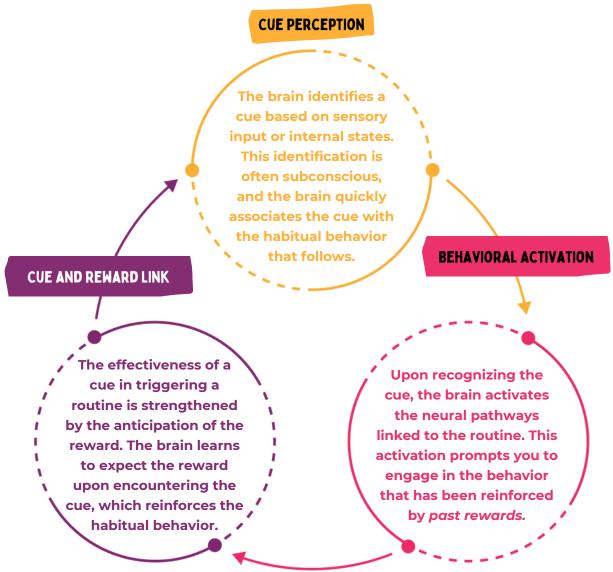


The cue acts as a trigger that initiates the habit, while the routine is the behavior performed in response to this trigger. Finally, the reward is the positive reinforcement received from completing the routine, which helps the brain remember and crave the loop in the future. Pretty simple right? Understanding how this loop (cycle) works is empowering. Use it to recognize and change your habits more effectively. You can also use it to learn how to take control of your habits by intentionally design routines that lead to healthier and more productive behaviors. Let's dig in a little bit deeper.



The Cue

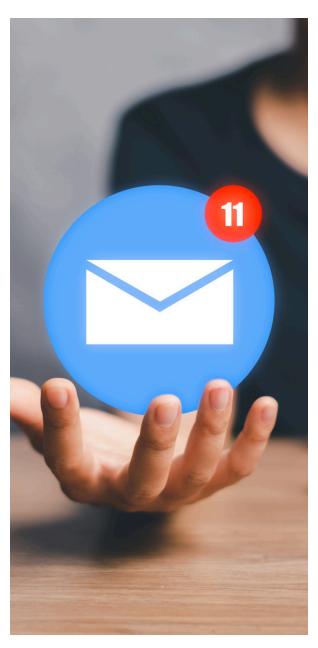
The cue is a trigger that initiates the habit. It is the starting point of the Cue-Routine-Reward loop, playing a crucial role in habit formation by triggering specific behaviors that have been reinforced by past rewards. It can be anything from a specific time of day, an emotional state, a particular location, or the presence of certain people. The cue signals the brain to start the routine, essentially telling it which habit to engage. For example, a common cue is waking up in the morning. For many people, the first thing they do after waking up is reach for their phone. The act of waking up serves as the cue.



The cue serves as a trigger or signal that prompts the brain to initiate a specific behavior. These cues are processed in areas of the brain like the basal ganglia and nucleus accumbens in the limbic system, which are involved in reward processing and habit formation. When a cue is perceived—such as a specific time of day, emotional state, or environmental cue—it *activates neural pathways associated with the behavior that follows*.

The Routine

The routine is the behavior itself, the action you perform in response to the cue. This can be a physical activity, an emotional response, or a mental process. For example, following the previous cue (waking up in the morning), the routine might be scrolling through social media or checking emails right after waking up.



The Reward

The reward is the positive reinforcement you receive from completing the routine. It's what makes your brain remember the loop in the future, providing a sense of satisfaction or relief. Continuing the previous example, the reward in the morning phone-checking habit could be the pleasure of catching up friends, news, seeing social media updates, or feeling prepared for the day after checking emails.



The reward is what satisfies a craving or provides a sense of pleasure, reinforcing the habit loop. Rewards release the neurotransmitters like dopamine in the brain's reward pathway. Dopamine is associated with pleasure and motivation, reinforcing the behavior that led to its release. The nucleus accumbens, part of the brain's reward system. instrumental in processing rewards and reinforcing behaviors associated with positive outcomes

Real-Life Examples of the Cue-Routine-Reward Loop

Example 1: Coffee Drinking Habit

- **Cue:** The clock strikes 10 AM during a workday.
- **Routine:** You head to the kitchen to make a cup of coffee.
- **Reward:** The caffeine boost helps you feel more alert and ready to tackle the rest of your tasks.



Example 2: Exercise Routine

- Cue: Finish your workday at 5 PM.
- **Routine:** You change into workout clothes and go for a run.
- Reward: You experience a rush of endorphins, reducing stress and improving your mood.



Example 3: Stress-Eating Habit

- **Cue:** You feel stressed after a challenging meeting.
- **Routine:** You reach for a sugary snack.
- Reward: A sweet treat provides a momentary sense of comfort and pleasure.



MODIFYING EXISTING HABITS

Once you understand how habits are formed through the Cue-Routine-Reward loop, the next challenge is often how to change an existing habit that no longer serves you well. Changing habits requires deliberate effort and a strategic approach to disrupt old patterns and establish new behaviors. Remember, these actions have been repeated quite a lot in the past by you and now they are integrated in your brain as habits. That's why breaking bad old habits like quit smoking or drinking is a tricky task: your brain recognizes these behaviors as stress relievers

Obesity and smoking are actually among the leading preventable causes of morbidity and mortality in the world. Not a big surprise, as both can still be infused by unhealthy habits even at work. However, examining the components of your current habits and implementing effective strategies can help you successfully modify your routines to align with your goals and aspirations.

This process involves understanding the triggers that initiate unwanted behaviors, replacing them with healthier alternatives, and reinforcing these changes through consistent practice.



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Good habits are developed in the workshop of our daily lives. It is not in the great moments of test and trial that character is built. That is only when it is displayed.

Delbert L. Stapley

Breaking Out of a Bad Habit Loop

There's a strong and proven relationship between healthy habits, stress, and health-related quality of life. Now that you know that a Habit Loop consists of three components (Cue, Routine, and Reward), you can begin exploring this concept on your own.

To break out of a bad habit loop, Duhigg suggests focusing on these components to change the routine while keeping the cue and reward intact. The latter also means understanding and manipulating these three components. The key here is to develop a new routine that fulfills the same craving in a healthier way. Time to act. Here's how to get started:

STEP



STEP



Identify the Routine

First, pinpoint the routine you want to change. This is the easy bit. You have to figure out what your habit routine is. This is the behavior that constitutes the bad habit.

For example, let's say you want to stop snacking on junk food in the afternoon or stop smoking when you feel angry at your colleagues for some reason.

Experiment with Rewards

Next, experiment with different rewards to determine what craving the routine is fulfilling. When you feel the urge to snack, try different activities instead:

- Go for a short walk
- Drink a glass of water
- Eat a piece of fruit
- Chat with a colleague

After each alternative activity, note how you feel. Are you still craving the snack, or has the urge subsided? This process helps you identify the actual reward driving the habit.

STEP 3



Isolate the Cue

Identify the cue that triggers your routine. Duhigg suggests tracking the following five categories when the craving hits:

- Location: Where are you?
- Time: What time is it?
- Emotional State: How do you feel?
- Other People: Who else is around?
- Immediately Preceding Action: What did you just do?

After a few days of tracking, you should start to notice patterns. For instance, you might find that the craving to snack hits around 3 PM (time) when you feel bored (emotional state) at your desk (location).

STEP 4



Create a Plan

Once you've identified the routine, the reward, and the cue, you can create a plan to change the habit. This involves **choosing a new routine** that provides a similar reward when the cue occurs. For example:

- Cue: 3 PM, feeling bored at your desk.
- Routine: Instead of grabbing a snack, you take a 5-minute walk around the office.
- Reward: You feel refreshed and more alert, reducing the boredom.

DID YOU KNOW

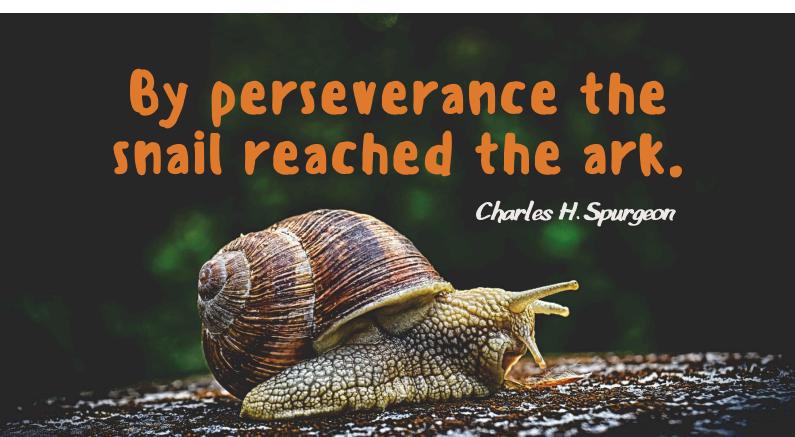


How long does it take to form a habit?

The duration required to form a habit can depend on the individual. Factors like personal motivation, the complexity of the behavior, and environmental support play crucial roles. For instance, a simple habit like drinking a glass of water after breakfast might take less time to establish compared to a more complex habit like exercising daily. So what does research say?

You've probably already heard about a popular idea out there that it takes 21 days to make a habit, which is widely cited but overly simplistic. This notion originated from Dr. Maxwell Maltz's observations in the 1960s, where he noted that it took around 21 days for patients to get used to changes from plastic surgery. However, this timeframe is not universally applicable to habit formation, as when Dr. Maltz shared his observation, it was never meant to become a general rule for habit formation.

A more comprehensive study conducted by Dr. Phillippa Lally and her team at University College London in 2009 found that, on average, it takes about 66 days for a new behavior to become automatic. This study involved participants who chose a new behavior and tracked their progress over 12 weeks. The time it took for habits to form ranged from 18 to 254 days, indicating significant variability. What does that mean? What if it took you longer? That would be perfectly natural. However, bring the following quote to your mind if that happens:



Ask yourself the following question: if the habit is important to you, does it really matter how long it takes to gain it? Hence, don't focus on the number of repetitions, but your attitude instead and being consistent until you make it happen. Failures are part of the process. Learn from them. If it helps, you could still set yourself an arbitrary number of consecutive days to hit. Is three consecutive days enough to get you going? Once you make that, then set a next checkpoint, and the next one until it becomes a natural item in your daily routine, which does not need counting any longer.



BEST PRACTICES

Developing a Growth Mindset for Healthy Habits to Manage Work-Related Stress

Managing work-related stress is a common challenge, but developing a growth mindset can be a powerful tool to tackle this issue. A growth mindset is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed with effort, learning, and persistence. This mindset contrasts with a fixed mindset, where individuals believe their traits are innate and unchangeable. The growth mindset can significantly influence how we form and maintain healthy habits, which are essential for managing stress.

When it comes to habits, the brain's plasticity plays a key role. Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections. When you develop a growth mindset, you engage in behaviors that reinforce these new connections. For example, if you start practicing a new healthy habit at work e.g. mindfulness to reduce stress, over time, your brain adapts and this practice becomes a more natural and automatic part of your daily routine.

Individuals with a growth mindset view challenges and changes as opportunities for development rather than obstacles. They believe they can improve their skills and abilities through effort and persistence. Adopting new habits often requires stepping out of comfort zones and making changes to daily routines. A growth mindset helps individuals embrace these changes and see the value in adopting healthier behaviors to manage stress. People with a growth mindset understand that effort and perseverance are key to success. They are more likely to stick with new practices until they become habits.

Key messages:

- 1. **Act:** Understand that your abilities and habits can improve with effort.
- 2. Embrace Challenges: See it as opportunities to learn and grow.
- 3. Make Setbacks work for you: When you encounter setbacks, don't see them as failures. Instead, analyze what went wrong, learn from it, and use that knowledge to improve.



EMBRACE CHALLENGES

You can significantly reduce work-related stress and enhance your overall well-being if you adopt a growth mindset and consistently developing healthy habits.

One of the best practices for developing a growth mindset is to embrace challenges and view failures as learning opportunities. When you face a stressful situation at work, instead of feeling defeated, see it as a chance to grow and improve.

TRY THIS:

Identify one specific unhealthy habit at work that contributes to your stress, e.g. skipping breaks or not managing your time effectively. Then, choose one healthy habit to replace it. For example:

- Unhealthy Habit: Skipping breaks.
- Healthy Habit: Taking a 5-minute break every hour to stretch, mindfulness or practice deep breathing.

Set a specific goal: For the next two weeks, commit to taking a 5-minute break every hour. Use a timer or an app to remind yourself. Track your progress. Reflect on how this change affects your stress levels and productivity.

PRACTICAL ACTIVITY



Breaking the Habit of Being Defensive About Criticism

Miscommunication and failing to exploit feedback are some of the most common stressors at the workplace. Chances are that you've already been into multiple such situations. What if you could change that? It is certainly worth giving it a try. Use the Habit loop concept to turn this into a healthy habit.

Start by **reflecting on recent instances** where you were defensive about criticism at work. Write down the situation in your journal. Identify the cue by noting what triggered your defensiveness, such as a specific person's feedback, the timing, or the way the feedback was delivered. Then, identify the routine by describing how you reacted, whether it was interrupting, denying the feedback, or becoming argumentative. Finally, identify the reward by considering what you gained from being defensive, like protecting your self-esteem, avoiding immediate conflict, or feeling temporarily justified.

Then, **think of alternative, healthier routines** to replace your defensive reaction. For instance, you could pause and breathe when you receive criticism, acknowledge the feedback and ask clarifying questions to understand it better, or express gratitude to the person for their input, regardless of how you feel about it initially. Over the next few days, intentionally practice these new routines when you encounter criticism. Note how each new routine makes you feel and how others respond to your change in behavior. Choose the new routine that felt most effective and comfortable for you and write it down in

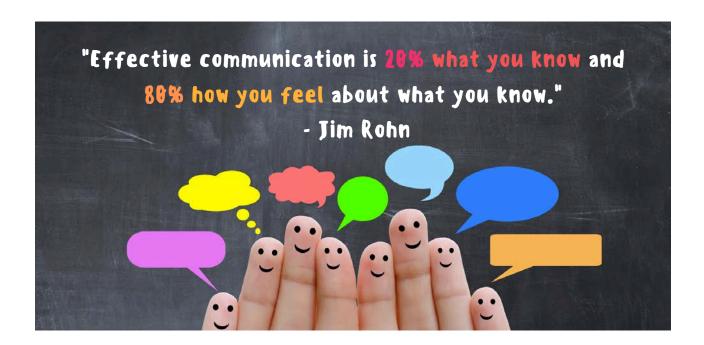
your journal as your new response to criticism. Set a goal to practice this new routine consistently over the next month. Use reminders, such as setting a daily intention or using a habit-tracking app, to reinforce the new behavior.

At the end of each week, **take a few minutes to reflect on your progress**. Write down any successes, challenges, and adjustments needed. If you find certain situations more challenging, consider additional strategies or seek feedback from a trusted colleague on how to improve further.

In conclusion, **summarize your learning experience** and recognize the importance of accepting and acting on constructive criticism for personal and professional growth. Commit to continuing the practice of your new routine, understanding that changing habits takes time and persistence. By engaging in this practical activity, you will gain a better understanding of your defensiveness and develop healthier responses to criticism, leading to improved relationships and professional development in the workplace.

How we perceive and respond to feedback, whether giving or receiving it, plays a crucial role in its effectiveness. Understanding and managing emotions around feedback can enhance how we communicate and learn from each other in professional settings. Most importantly, it can help us reduce work-related stress and avoid burnout, which are very often caused by failing to respond adequately to feedback, including criticism or remarks by colleagues.

Learn more about how you can improve your communication skills, by you checking out Topic 5 of Unit 2 of this training course.



FORM NEW HEALTHY HABITS

Develop New Habits Using the Cue-Routine-Reward Loop

Understanding the Cue-Routine-Reward loop from a neuroscience perspective helps us see how habits are deeply ingrained in our brain's circuitry. Essentially, what you need to do is to manage to learn how to manipulating cues, routines, rewards consciously, to effectively establish new habits or modify existing ones to achieve desired outcomes in your daily life. This framework role of underscores the neural pathways, reward systems, and neurochemicals in shaping our behaviors and ultimately our habits.



Get started by:

- 1. **Identify a Desired Habit:** Decide on a new habit you want to establish. For instance, you might want to start reading more books.
- 2. **Choose a Cue:** Select a specific, consistent cue that will trigger the habit. This could be something you already do regularly, like finishing dinner. For example: Every night after dinner (cue), you plan to read for 30 minutes.
- 3. **Plan the Routine:** Define the action you want to take in response to the cue. For example, after dinner, you go to a comfortable spot and read a book for 30 minutes.
- 4. **Determine the Reward:** Think and identify what's the reward that will satisfy you after completing the routine. For example, the reward could be the enjoyment and relaxation from reading, or treating yourself to a small piece of dark chocolate.
- 5. **Reinforce the Loop**: Consistency is key in reinforcing the cue-routine-reward loop. The more you repeat the cycle, the stronger the habit becomes.

ASSESSMENT

01.

What is the role of habits in managing work-related stress?

- A- They are automatic responses to stress triggers.
- B- They help in maintaining a balanced lifestyle.
- C- They are unrelated to stress management.

03.

How can understanding the Cue-Routine-Reward loop help in managing habits?

- A- By identifying triggers and replacing routines.
- B- By ignoring the role of rewards.
- C- By creating more stress.

02.

Why is it important to cultivate healthy habits?

- A- To protect against immediate dangers.
- B- To effectively manage stress.
- C- To eliminate stress triggers.

04.

Which of the following is a healthy habit at the workplace?

- A- Multitasking
- B- Taking regular breaks
- C- Skipping breaks

05. 07. Which of the following is an How long does it typically take to unhealthy habit at the form a new habit? workplace? A- 21 days. A- Maintaining good posture. B- 66 days on average. B- Practicing mindfulness. C- It's different from person C- Stay up late at work to another. 06. 08. What is the first step in changing What strategy can help break out a bad habit? of a bad habit loop? A- Identify the routine. A- Developing a fixed mindset. **B-** Experiment with B- Developing a growth rewards. mindset. C- Isolate the cue. C- Continuing with the same routine.

ASSESSMENT ANSWERS

1-B	2-B	3-A	4-B
5-C	6-A	7- C	8-C

KEY TAKEAWAYS

01

Developing healthy habits is crucial for effectively managing work-related stress and preventing burnout in modern life.

02

Understanding the Cue-Routine-Reward loop can help identify triggers and replace unhealthy habits with more beneficial routines.

03

Effective habit change involves identifying cues, experimenting with rewards, and creating strategic plans for behavior modification.

04

Persistence and consistency are crucial in forming new habits, as habits can take varying amounts of time to become automatic and integrated into daily routines.

05

Embracing a growth mindset can facilitate the adoption of healthier habits by viewing challenges as opportunities for personal and professional development.

RESOURCE LIBRARY

Remember when in the beginning we talked about how habits are individual? It's crucial that you get to know yourself by discovering both your healthy and unhealthy habits. Here are a few very interesting resources to boost your curiosity:



THE HABIT SEED

If you are more into video content, you may want to check the <u>Habit Seed YouTube</u> videos, to learn more about habit formation. They've also created a couple easy to start templates for you to try:

HABIT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

DEVELOPING SELF - DISCIPLINE



THE SCIENCE OF HABITS | TEDX

Marco Badwal is a full-time research scholar at Harvard University who researches learning and memory. Watch his TEDX talk about the building and implementation of habits and their benefit to "get a bit better every day".

LINK TO YOUTUBE



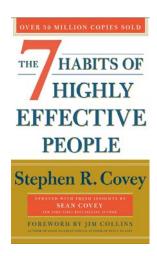
THE POWER OF HABIT: CHARLES DUHIGG

In this ingenious talk, Pulitzer Prize winning writer Charles Duhigg seamlessly combines informational facts from research, anecdotes from real events, and personal experience with insightful observations to explain why human behaviors are compelled by habit.

LINK TO YOUTUBE

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THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

This all time classic outlines seven core principles designed to help individuals achieve their personal and professional goals more effectively and its is certainly worth the read. Alternatively, you watch the video summary below to discover more about the book and what are the seven habits Covey speaks about in it.

HABIT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

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