**Day 40**

**Title: Willpower vs. Habit Power**

How many times have you tried to change your diet? Once? Twice? More times than you can count? How many of those times did you depend on your willpower to make big changes in how ate? You might think you have to muscle your way through it, exerting willpower to dominate your desires all day long.

That might have worked for a few days, but chances are, once you hit a day where you were tired, stressed, or just sick of grapefruit, your willpower crumbled and you found yourself half way through a pint of ice cream, wondering how you got there. We’ve all been there.

Willpower sounds like a great thing. Sure, willpower might get us through one breakfast or maybe even all the way to dinner, but it will eventually fail us. Every time we use willpower to choose to stick to a healthy diet instead of giving into temptation, we use up some of the internal resources that help us exert self-control. That means we have fewer resources left for the next time we need some willpower. When willpower is weak, and it’s difficult to exert self-control, we fall back on our habits. It makes sense, then, to create healthy habits.

**Cue the habit!**

Habits are automatic responses to a particular cue. Almost anything can be a cue for an action that becomes a habit. Your alarm clock going off in the morning is a cue to get out of bed or hit the snooze button. Watching a movie on a Friday night with your family can be a cue to make popcorn or order pizza. These cues can have different types of reactions, and therefore different habits. You can make your habits be whatever you want them to be.

**Creating habits**

It’s easier to create a habit than to break one. So if you want healthy habits in your life, look to replace an unhealthy habit with a healthy one, rather than scrapping a habit completely. But how do you create a habit?

Say you want to remember to eat your vegetables first. If you’re used to dabbling around, tasting a little bit of this and that, it might be difficult to focus on one part of your plate. But you know that starting with your vegetables is a good way to fill up with low-calorie, nutrient-rich goodness, so you want to give it a go. What can you use as a cue for this behavior? Try making your first three bites of any meal be your vegetables. Or even put handwritten note on your table with the reminder “veggies first!”

Each time you respond to the cue with the behavior you want, you’ll move closer to forming a habit. The more often you repeat this behavior prompted by the cue, the quicker you’ll form the habit. You might have heard the old adage: “it takes 30 days to make or break a habit.” Researchers in the UK found it really takes anywhere from 18 to 254 days to create a habit, with an average of 66 days. So don’t get discouraged if creating a good eating habit takes longer than a month.

**How to take action**

If you want to create a healthy eating habit so that you don’t have to rely upon willpower to make healthy decisions, start here:

1. Ask yourself what you want to achieve. Say you want to take a healthy snack at lunch so you aren’t tempted to raid the vending machine. Now, make that an actionable, specific statement. “I will take a healthy snack to work each day.”
2. Look for a good cue to trigger your action. Since you need to make sure your snack gets into your purse or work bag every day, what will serve as your cue? Do you pack lunch for your kids at night? Use that as a cue to pack a snack for yourself, as well. Or maybe you do a little bit of work at night after dinner. Use that habit of packing your work bag for the next day as a cue to include a snack. Just remember, though, if you give yourself a night off, you will lose your cue, and you might forget your snack for the next day.
3. Start practicing your habit. Don’t worry if you forget once in awhile. Keep at it and before you know it, you’ll have a healthy eating habit.

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