This Habit Forming Tip Helped Me Actually Make Habits Stick

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A simple addition to "habit stacking" could make all the difference.

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Some time ago when reading the book *Atomic Habits*, I learned about a technique called *habit stacking*. The key idea is that you can build new habits from ones that already exist. This technique is basically game changing, but I feel that there is one subsequent tip that can help make

the habits really stick, and I haven't really seen it discussed yet, so I thought I'd share my experience.

First, what is *habit stacking*? The formula is:

After I [CURRENT HABBIT] I will [NEW HABIT]

If the existing habit and the desired habit are related enough and provide enough motivation to actually continue to do the next habit, then you can form these 'habit stacking' chains and build new habits in a very organic way.

One way to approach habit stacking is:

- List the current things you **already** do every day in one column

- List the things you **want** to do in another column

- Identify the things you want to do that fit well with things you already do

- Literally write down or say to yourself the formula above

Let's take one step back. Why would you want to habit stack in the first place? In my case, I felt like I was not regularly stretching or exercising enough literally on a daily basis. I wanted a lightweight approach to ensure I actually did these things.

Using the habit stacking approach, I realized that it may be convenient to stretch right after I shower because I already feel great and stretching makes me feel even better so it feels like a nice chain of events.

I also realized that I tend to enjoy food much better after I have 'earned

it' which implies some level of physical exertion on my part to have earned the food. I therefore decided to do at least 30 body squats and pushups right before lunch to 'earn my meal' no matter what. It seemed like a pretty basic thing to do, so this is what my stack looked like:

Shower	Exercise
↓	↓
Stretch	Eat Lunch
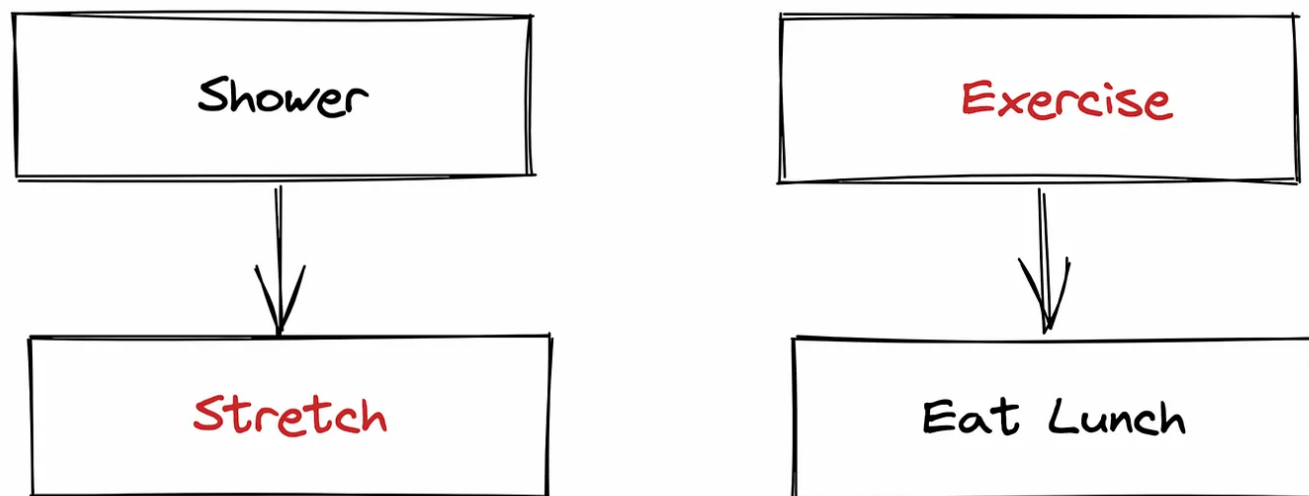
First note, that there is a (minor) modification to the habit stacking formula above here:

Before I [HABIT: Eat Lunch] I will [NEW HABIT: Exercise]

For weeks I was so happy with the results, but I realized that there were inevitably days I would, for example, either forget or otherwise not be conveniently able to stretch after the shower. That's when I realized that one simple tip added to habit tracking can go a real long way.

Before I [HABIT: Exercise] I will First [HABIT Stretch]

In the example above, it would look like:
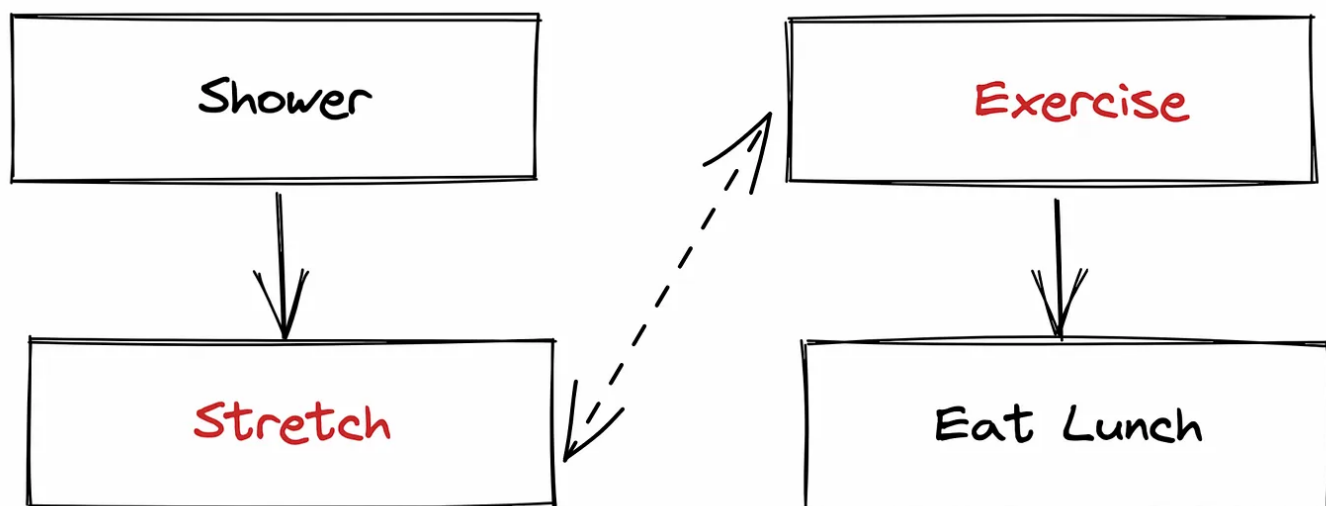
This approach affords for you to skip a new habit in a habit stack but revisit it in a related habit stack later. I have found this to be very helpful because you can create habit stacks that are decoupled but also related in the case you happened to not be able to execute on a habit stack in the past. In other words: you don't have to create long habit stacks of related habits. You can decouple them and only re-couple them if a previous desired habit wasn't performed. In the example above, the two habit chains can be separated in time by hours. In the case that I didn't stretch, I end up connecting the habit stacks.

This approach adds a level of flexibility that has really helped to make habits actually stick for me. It allows you to make mistakes in one habit stack and correct for them in another.

That's it. It's a really simple tip that has worked for me, and I hope it resonates with, and ideally helps you build better habits 🙂.