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10 DAILY HABITS THAT WILL GIVE YOU INCREDIBLE WILLPOWER

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“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.” – Aristotle.

Success is a lot of small things done well, day after day.

(<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/one-thousand-ones>)

What seems like an overnight success is usually a very long

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what seems like an overnight success is usually a very long time in the making. Success is created from people who establish the right habits, then execute them over and over.

So I wanted to share with you the top 10 habits that have been scientifically proven to give you incredible willpower!

1. MEDITATE

Meditation is the fastest and most effective way to increase your willpower. By meditating (<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/benefits-of-meditation-on-willpower>) you are training the brain to focus and resist the urge to wander. Research shows that after just 2-3 days of practicing meditation for 10 minutes, your brain will be able to focus better, you will have more energy, and you will be less stressed. [1 (http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3200/JACH.56.5.569-578#.VFy5HvTF_88)]

There are a lot of myths surrounding meditation. Burning incense, chanting, wearing robes, etc. So let's start by explaining what meditation really is.

Meditation is simply the practice of bringing your thoughts to the present moment. 47% of our lives are spent either reminiscing about the past or thinking about what we are going to do in the future. [2 (<http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2010/11/wandering-mind-not-a-happy-mind/>)]

We spend very little time with a clear, focused mind on what we are doing *right now*.

Meditation attempts to do just that. This is usually done by sitting upright in a room that is clear of distractions and focusing solely on your breathing. However, it can be achieved with any activity that brings your full focus and attention.

For example, if you are completely focused on the task of cleaning dishes; without mentally going over your day, pondering another problem in your head, or thinking about

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what you will be doing next, you can achieve a state of meditation.

If your mind is clear and focused completely on the present task, you will see the benefits of meditation.

To get started meditating, check out this article (<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/benefits-of-meditation-on-willpower>) which will give you the tools and exercises you need to begin adding the habit of daily meditation.

2. EAT A LOW GLYCEMIC DIET

When the body takes in food, it creates a chemical known as glucose (<http://learn.fi.edu/learn/brain/carbs.html>) that travels through the blood stream. **This is what the brain uses as its source of fuel to think, create, and exert willpower.** So to ensure a healthy stock of willpower, we want to make sure our brain has enough glucose to use as energy. [3

(<http://www.uky.edu/~njdewa2/gailliotetal07JPSP.pdf>)]

Any food that contains calories will give your brain glucose to work with. But not all glucose is created equally. Sugary foods will cause a quick spike of glucose, giving you willpower fuel for the short-term, but will cause a subsequent crash that depletes your willpower just as fast.

The best thing you can do is keep the glucose level in your bloodstream steady. This will give your brain a consistent reserve of fuel to exert willpower for the long-term. **To accomplish this, researchers suggest a low-glycemic diet.** [4 (http://www.amazon.com/Food-Rules-Eaters-Michael-Pollan-ebook/dp/B002YJK5L4/ref=sr_1_1?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1415726126&sr=1-1&keywords=food+rules+by+michael+pollan)]

Here are some low-glycemic foods that will give you long-term willpower fuel:

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Nothing fancy is required – just lean cuts of beef, poultry, pork and fish.

2. NUTS

Specifically those nuts that are high in omega-3 fatty acids like walnuts, pecans and cashews. (Note: this does not include legumes like peanuts).

3. FRESH FRUIT

Fresh fruit is preferred over dried fruit because dried fruits have a high concentration of sugar in them. This will result in the glucose spike for the short term and lead to a subsequent crash. Some good choices are bananas, blueberries, apples and cherries.

4. VEGETABLES

All vegetables will help build your long-term willpower, but specific veggies have a lot of willpower fuel in them are root-based. These include sweet potatoes, carrots and onions which will all give you some serious willpower fuel!

Do not try to completely overhaul your diet if you are not used to eating these types of foods. Instead focus on eating them for *just one meal per day*. The best of which would be eating them for breakfast.

(<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/what-to-eat-for-breakfast>)

3. GET ENOUGH SLEEP

When you don't get enough sleep, your willpower takes the biggest hit. When you are tired, your brain cells are not able to absorb glucose as efficiently as when you are well rested. **This means that you begin lose the “power” in your willpower.** [5 (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19444258>)]

Then your brain will recognize the fact that it is not getting enough glucose, and immediately start to crave sugary foods and caffeine to replenish its supply. However, because your brain cells are not absorbing glucose as efficiently as they should be, not only will you give in to eating junk, you will **eat**



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much more than you need.

Your brain will continue to crave junk food until it gets as much glucose as it can out of your bloodstream – regardless of how many calories that may be.

Luckily, there are scientifically proven tactics that will help you get a better night's sleep even without adding more hours:

1. A COMPLETELY DARK ROOM

Most of us underestimate the affect that lights in our room have on our sleep. When our room is completely dark, it helps our brain shut down and sleep more efficiently. This helps us get more rest out of the hours we lay in bed; helping to restore our willpower. [6 (<http://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.1000145>)]

2. NAP

Other research suggests that it is the amount of consecutive hours you spend awake that matters the most. So breaking up the day with a nap can have significant benefits. It is better to sleep for 7 hours with a 1-hour nap than it is to sleep for 8 consecutive hours without taking that break during the day. [7 (<http://www.webmd.com/balance/features/the-secret-and-surprising-power-of-naps>)]

3. CREATE A RESERVOIR

Getting more sleep on the weekend will create a reserve of energy your brain can use for willpower during the week. So if you cannot squeeze more hours of sleep in during the week, see if you can catch up on the weekend. [8

(<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sleep-newzzz/201311/can-you-ever-really-catch-sleep>)]

4. EXERCISE

We all know that exercise is good for our health, but can it also be good for our willpower (<http://willpowered.co/learn/effects-of-exercise-on-willpower>)? In order to find out, researchers found 24 non-exercisers between 18 and 50 to partake in a 2-

month study. They were given free gym memberships and asked to exercise just 1x/week for the first month and 3x/week for the second month.

Throughout the study they would test the participants on various self-control activities from resisting temptations to persevering through challenging tasks.

The results were nothing short of remarkable.

After just **2 months of exercise** every participant had indeed **increased his or her ability to resist temptations and persevere on tasks.**

But the benefits didn't end there. Without any instruction by the researchers, the participants also:

- Procrastinated less
- Felt more in control of their emotions
- Reduced smoking, alcohol and caffeine intake
- Saved more money
- Ate less junk food
- Began eating a healthier diet
- Watched less TV
- Spent more time studying
- Splurged on impulse purchases less
- Were more likely to be on time to appointments

All of these activities occurred naturally from the habitual exercise! [9 (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17032494>)]

Now, before you set a plan to go from not exercising at all to exercising every day, let's pause. It's important to remember that for a full month, these participants only went to the gym 1x/week. That means they only went 4 times total in the entire

first month!

Clearly, **it is not necessary for you to go crazy with your exercise plan.** To start getting all of the benefits listed above, you just need to **make a plan that is consistent, not overwhelming.** Whether you can exercise 1x/week or 4x/week, it doesn't matter. To see the benefits, you just need to set a plan that you will not fail.

(<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/limits-of-willpower>)

5. FOCUS ON ONE TASK AT A TIME

Ready for a puzzle? See if you can write down a list of all 50 states.

When you have listed 10, see if you can continue writing them while also figuring out the answer to 17×24 .

Were you able to do it?

We have 2 distinct parts of our brain that help in our problem-solving. One is the **limbic system**, (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_system) which makes **our easy and automatic decisions.** This includes brushing our teeth and stopping at a red light. This part of the brain is also short-term minded, and is what motivates us to indulge in unhealthy food and get off of the treadmill.

The other is the **pre-frontal cortex** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prefrontal_cortex), which **solves more difficult problems** like how to effectively communicate or solve more complicated math equations like the one above. This is also the part of our brain that thinks long-term and is responsible for our willpower.

The problems above both require the pre-frontal cortex to solve. If I were to ask you to write the 50 states and do a simple problem like 10×5 , you would have had no problem doing it. 10×5 is easy. It only requires our limbic system to solve, so we can successfully multi-task.

The more we multi-task, the more we train our limbic system. So by trying to do 4 things at once, we are unknowingly making the part of the brain that wants us to indulge stronger.

The pre-frontal cortex, however, cannot multi-task. The problems it deals with are too complicated. **So by focusing on one task at a time, we are making the part of the brain that exerts willpower stronger!**

So resist the temptation to multi-task and remain focused. This will train your willpower and help you make tough decisions. [10

(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0374533555/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0374533555&linkCode=as2&tag=willpowered-20&linkId=IW6D3B7HSSX7YFMN)]

6. PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

We tend to believe that every choice we make throughout the day goes through a process of well-informed decision-making. But 45% of our daily-decision are made completely automatically. From what we decide to eat, what we decide to wear and what we decide to do when we first get to work, our brains are running on autopilot. [11

(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0374533555/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0374533555&linkCode=as2&tag=willpowered-20&linkId=IW6D3B7HSSX7YFMN)]

You can overcome this tendency by becoming more mindful (<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/value-of-mindfulness>) of your daily decisions. This is as simple as pausing and questioning *why* you are making the decision to get coffee as soon as you make it into the office. Or why you are eating cereal for breakfast rather than eggs.

Simply question these daily decisions and you will strengthen your willpower to make better choices throughout the day. [10

(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0374533555/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0374533555&linkCode=as2&tag=willpowered-20&linkId=IW6D3B7HSSX7YFMN)]

7. SELF-MONITORING

Something odd happens in our brains when we look at ourselves in the mirror. The part of the brain that would say "hey, that's me in the mirror" is not activated. Instead it is a part of the brain that says "I wish I was taller, skinnier, more muscular, etc." [12

(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0143122231/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0143122231&linkCode=as2&tag=willpowered-20&linkId=FWXY62FGMWK344LA)]

In other words, rather than seeing see *who we are*, we see *who we want to be*. This is not because we are shallow, it is because we all have an ideal self that we want to live up to. **With this ideal self in our mind, we begin to think and act more like them.**

The best way to keep your ideal self in mind is through a process called Self-Monitoring

(<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/self-monitoring>). This involves keeping track of as much information on yourself as possible. Like with the mirror, you will look at the information on yourself and compare it to what you really want. This will strengthen your willpower and help you make better decisions.

To get started, check out the list of ways to begin self-monitoring at the bottom of this article (<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/self-monitoring>).

8. PLAY OFFENSE

When researchers came across a group of people in the Netherlands who seemingly had unstoppable willpower, they thought they must be saints. They ate extremely healthy, exercised regularly, hardly procrastinated and reported less stress than almost everyone around them.

But they were not saints at all. Many of them reported that if they were to get behind a bar stool, they would never leave

they were to get behind a bar stool, they would never leave. Others reported that they were unable to resist sweets whenever they were around. It seemed that these "saints" were prone to the same temptations as the rest of us. [13 (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21878607>)]

So what was their secret?

The secret, it turned out, was that **these people simply did not put themselves in those situations**. Their lifestyles were well-organized to prevent having to look temptation in the face.

These people played offense. They thought about what might tempt them in the future – whether it was alcohol, sweets, or distractions from work – and set themselves up to avoid them. They were seemingly willpower super heroes because they almost never had to use it.

In your life, look for the things that test your willpower. How can you play offense (<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/playing-offense>) and remove future temptations?

9. FIND INSPIRATION

We have all experienced the feeling of inspiration at some point in our lives. It may have been from a story in history, a speech by a great leader, or by someone in our own lives. When we become inspired, we get a rush of energy that we feel can take us to new heights. **It's almost as if we get more willpower.**

When we witness something inspiring, the part of the pre-frontal cortex (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prefrontal_cortex) that thinks about the long-term lights up. The neurons in this part of the brain start firing and we feel a rush of energy as we begin to believe in our dreams and goals.

This essentially means that by becoming inspired, we give the pre-frontal cortex more power. This strengthens our willpower and makes it easier to work towards our long-term

goals. [14 (http://www.amazon.com/Willpower-Instinct-Self-Control-Works-Matters-ebook/dp/B005ERIRZE/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1415642918&sr=1-1&keywords=the+willpower+instinct)]

To tap into this willpower, find something inspiring that you can turn to on a daily basis. This will help you find the willpower you need even when times get tough.

(<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/get-through-the-middle>)

10. CHUNKING

The last and perhaps the most important willpower habit is chunking (<http://www.willpowered.co/learn/chunking>).

Chunking is the process of taking a large task, goal, dream, etc. and breaking it into manageable “chunks”.

If you’ve ever had a goal, you know how exciting it can be at first. You can see the “after photo” of your life when the goal is achieved - **and you love what you see**. You imagine all of the great things about the “new you” and you can't wait to get started working towards that goal!

Then it’s time to actually do the work. And whether that work is putting pen to paper, or putting foot to treadmill, you get a sudden rush of being completely overwhelmed. You see just how much work it’s going to take to get you from where you are, to where you want to be. Then you get paralyzed by the fact that you don’t know where to begin. So you don't bother trying, or you lose the persistence to keep going.

Chunking works because it shifts your focus from that larger goal, into smaller chunks that are easier for your brain to comprehend. If your goal is to follow a 12-week exercise plan, it can be overwhelming when you’re tired on day 4 and thinking about the fact that *you have 80 more days of this*. [15 (<http://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/Bandura1981JPSP.pdf>)]

But if you shift your focus to simply accomplishing the workout plan *today*, you are far less likely to become overwhelmed. Then, before you know it, 20, 40, 60 days have passed and

you are more confident than ever that we can make it to the end.

CONCLUSION

Excellence is a habit. It is a lot of small things done well, day-after-day. Starting any one of the habits listed above has been proven to give you incredible willpower over time. **But you must be consistent.**

It will be far more beneficial for you to begin just 1 of these daily willpower habits and do it consistently, than to do all 10 for a short period of time. **So select just 1 habit to add to your life and stick to it.** After it has truly become a habit, move on to the next one. Over time, you will see incredible benefits to your willpower!

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