

# Atomic Habits Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Atomic Habits* is the definitive guide to break bad behaviors and adopt good ones in four steps, showing you how small, incremental, everyday routines compound and add up to massive, positive change over time.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



One of the best keynote speeches I've seen is Seth Godin's [presentation](#) for his book *Linchpin*. On one of the slides, he shows a baseball bat flying into the stands, with people ducking away and raising their arms in terror.

While Seth uses the picture to make a point about [our irrational fears](#), in some rare cases, those fears come true. James Clear was one of those cases. When he was in high school, a loose bat smashed right into his face. Broken nose, dangerous brain swellings, dislocated eyes, fractures, his recovery took months.

To get his own baseball career back on track, he had no choice but to rely on the power of small gains. In college, he slowly accumulated good habits and eventually managed to become one of 33 players for the All-American Academic team. Wow!

Today, he is one of the most popular habit researchers, reaching millions through his blog at [JamesClear.com](https://JamesClear.com). His first book, *Atomic Habits*, is now the definitive guide on the topic and has quickly become a New York Times bestseller!

Here are 3 lessons to help you use everything he's learned to break bad habits and form good ones:

1. Every time we perform a habit, we execute a four-step pattern: cue, craving, response, reward.
2. If we want to form new habits, we should make them obvious, attractive, easy, and satisfying.

3. You can use a habit tracker as a fun way to measure your progress and make sure you don't fall off the wagon.

Let's see what it takes to form new habits by learning from a true habit master!

## Lesson 1: All habits are based on a four-step pattern, which consists of cue, craving, response, and reward.

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In 1776, Adam Smith laid the foundation of modern economics in his *magnum opus*, *The Wealth of Nations*. One of his most famous observations is that, in a free market system, all workers naturally maximize their own society's welfare, even if merely acting in their own best interest:

*"...he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention."*

When it comes to habits, James suggests that **environment is the invisible hand that shapes human behavior**. That's why a prompt is always the first step in performing any habit. It may not *always* be external, but, most of the time, it will be. Then, three more stages follow to complete the four-step pattern:

1. **Cue.** A piece of information that suggests there's a reward to be found, like the smell of a cookie or a dark room waiting to light up.
2. **Craving.** The motivation to change something to get the reward, like tasting the delicious cookie or being able to see.
3. **Response.** Whatever thought or action you need to take to get to the reward.
4. **Reward.** The satisfying feeling you get from the change, along with the lesson whether to do it again or not.

There are several popular methodologies that try to predict how and why we do what we do, such as Charles Duhigg's habit loop, Gretchen Rubins four tendencies, or BJ Fogg's Tiny Habits behavior model. James offers a more refined version of what Duhigg described in *The Power of Habit* and while all of these approaches are different, none of them are mutually exclusive.

## Lesson 2: To form habits, you must make them obvious, attractive, easy, and satisfying.

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From the four-step pattern he suggests, James then derives four laws of behavior change, which correspond to one part of the loop each. Here they are, along with some ideas for how you can use them to facilitate good behaviors and make bad ones harder:

1. **Make it obvious.** Don't hide your fruits in your fridge, put them on display front and center.
2. **Make it attractive.** Start with the fruit you like the most, so you'll actually want to eat one when you see it.
3. **Make it easy.** Don't create needless friction by focusing on fruits that are hard to peel. Bananas and apples are super easy to eat, for example.

4. **Make it satisfying.** If you like the fruit you picked, you'll love eating it *and* feel healthier as a result!

You can apply these to all kinds of good habits, like running, working on a side project, spending more time with family, and so on. Conversely, do the opposite for bad habits. Make them invisible, unattractive, difficult, and unsatisfying. For example, you could hide your cigarettes, add financial penalties, get rid of all lighters, and only allow yourself to smoke outside in the cold.

## Lesson 3: A habit tracker is a fun and easy way to ensure you stick to your new behaviors.

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With a framework like this, making and breaking habits becomes fun. You'll likely want to tackle multiple things sooner rather than later, but it's important to not take on too much at once. An easy way of keeping yourself accountable without becoming overwhelmed is to track your habits with a habit tracker.

The idea is simple: **You keep a record of all the behaviors you want to establish or abandon and, at the end of each day, you mark which ones you succeeded with.** This record can be a single piece of paper, a journal, a calendar, or a digital tool, like an app.

This strategy is based on what's sometimes called the Seinfeld productivity hack. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld apparently marked his calendar with a big 'X' every day he came up with a joke. Soon, his goal was to not break the chain. It's a simple, but effective strategy to help you build good habits.

And since habits are the compound interest of self-improvement, that's a process we should all start today.

## Atomic Habits Review

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When it comes to changing our behavior, we all need to find out what works for us. That said, there are several scientifically proven strategies we should all try first. Atomic Habits is a complete, fun, engaging, and simple to understand compendium of those strategies. I highly recommend you make it your first stop when wanting to learn about the science of habits.

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- Why it's so hard to maintain even small changes in our everyday routines
- How our brains form habits in the first place
- The concept of using implementation intentions to improve follow-through
- Why all habits should be easy to start

- How evolution has made it difficult to make our habits satisfying

## **Who would I recommend the Atomic Habits summary to?**

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The 17 year old high school athlete, who wants to go pro in college, the 43 year old overworked creative, who struggles with finding time for sports, and anyone who's never written down a list of their habits.