

Changing habits mindfully

A guidebook for making or breaking a habit





Let's start fresh.

Many of us make resolutions each new year. And for many of us – according to research, a little over 90% of us – they don't .. quite ... stick. And that can be disheartening. We may even take it as a personal failing or lack of willpower (it isn't).

There is another way. A more compassionate approach. With mindfulness, it is possible to more easily and reliably cultivate a new habit or release an old one. And habits – small, consistent everyday choices – are what change our lives and our worlds in meaningful ways.

The truth is, each moment is full of inspiring possibility and potency. A blank slate. An invitation to grow, improve, and change.

This journal will help you discover the small, doable shifts that will add up to more profound changes.

What's asking for change in your life?



Take time for meaningful self-reflection. Review what's been working for you and what hasn't; feel into what you would like to do and how you'd like to feel differently.

Cultivating a new habit or letting go of one that no longer serves can help us create closer alignment between what we desire and how we live.

What have you been meaning to stop or start doing? Put another way, what habits would you like to make or break? Perhaps a daily meditation practice, eating more greens, limiting screen time, developing a new skill, quitting refined sugar, creating art, exercising regularly, cutting out complaining, practicing gratitude, performing random acts of kindness ...?

How we explore these questions is our first opportunity to draw mindfulness into our habit-changing process.

Hold the questions as you sip tea, meditate, listen to contemplative music, sit in nature, doodle, free-write, go for a walk, or do any other thing that supports you in connecting with your own needs and imagination. Then, pay attention to yourself. What comes up might not be what you expect.

Record your reflections.

LET'S FIND A COMFORTABLE-ISH PLACE TO BEGIN.


If your reflection time in the last exercise brought up multiple changes you'd like to make, you're not alone. We have creative minds, full of ideas. None of the desired habits you listed need to be rejected but we're going to ask you to choose just one to start with. (It's commonly held that most new habits take about 21 days to form. That means 17 new habit cycles per year. Lots of chances to attend to each in its own time.)

Look back over what you've written and see which habit calls to you for right now. The thought of making this change should spark excitement and just a little bit of uncertainty. Choose a habit that will require some (gentle) stretch, not the easiest one and not the most difficult. Practice self-compassion and begin with a shift that feels challenging but manageable.

A note: This is not an appropriate place to work on your deepest, darkest, most tangled habit. Never go those alone, but ensure you have a therapist or other health professional to guide and support you.

The habit I'm starting with:



A man with a beard and brown hair is shown in profile, looking upwards with his eyes closed. He is wearing a bright red jacket. The background is a blurred landscape of mountains and water, suggesting a serene outdoor setting.

The habit you're choosing
to make or break first came
from a centered place. Now
we're going to refine it with

Calm's 6 Golden Rules of a Mindful Intention

MAKE YOUR INTENTIONS SMART

Specific

For example, “I want to read more” is a powerful declaration but it is not a specific intention or goal, but “I will read 12 books” is specific.

Measurable

When we have a goal in mind, we tend to want to achieve it right away. And if there is no objective way to track progress, then anything less than perfection (which is impossible, of course), disappoints and discourages. But if we set intentions that are measurable, it's easier to see the small shifts that are happening, and we feel encouraged. Let's say you want to make a habit of regular meditation; you might set an intention of doing the Calm 3-minute Loving-Kindness meditation in the app as part of your morning routine. It's easy to measure how many days a week you manage that.

Attainable

Now it's time to be honest – and compassionate – with yourself. Look for ways to make the shift more gentle and manageable for yourself. If you struggle to put down your phone, expecting yourself to cut down to 15 minutes of screen time on it daily probably isn't reasonable. Maybe the new habit could be no phone use during mealtimes or after a certain time each day? If you've chosen to stop doing something as your intention, it might be more supportive to turn it around and start a new habit. For instance, instead of kicking sugar, maybe you choose to increase your veggies at each meal? Once you're doing your new habit with consistency, there's nothing stopping you from setting a new intention.

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Relevant

Make sure your habit inspires, excites, or motivates you, and that it directly connects to what you hope to feel and experience for yourself in a bigger way.

Time-bound

Of course we want our new habits to last, but forever is a long time, and it can be demotivating or hard to begin when the goal ahead is so big. Instead, pick an amount of time to try on your intention. For example, if you want to create a habit of meditating daily, “I will try to complete the 21 Days of Calm meditation series over the next three weeks” is time-bound. Now it's an experiment and that's a valuable way to learn about yourself. Once you've completed your intention, you can decide to keep going or shift the plan.

Review your chosen habit and refine it, if necessary, to be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound:



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MAKE IT VISIBLE

Ideas can float around in our heads for a long time. Writing it down, as you did on the previous page, makes it real. Making it visible, which is the next step, is what makes us mindful of it. We all need reminders. Take your intention and put it somewhere you'll see it often, like on your mirror, on the back of your phone, on your computer's wallpaper. If the whole intention feels too personal to post where someone else might see, you could shorten it to a single word or phrase, whatever might be a meaningful shorthand reminder for you.

Where will you post your written intention for yourself?



MAKE A PLAN

Now that you know the what (your new habit), it's time to figure out the how. What do you need to do in order to stay true to your commitment? It's helpful to think about what might get in your way. For example, if you want to begin meditating first thing in the morning but are a natural late-sleeper, it could be hard to manage. You might decide that evening is a better time for your practice. Or if you want to give up coffee but usually have a lot of meetings at the local coffee house, you might plan to suggest walking meetings or hitting the juice bar instead.

Fill out the table below.

Possible obstacles to sticking with my new habit	Ideas for how to handle obstacles



DO IT

Once you've set yourself up, using the steps above, whatever new habit you've planned for yourself? It is doable. Maybe not easy, but doable. Don't wait for circumstances to be ideal; just give yourself permission to imperfectly begin.

PRACTICE AWARENESS

As you experiment with your new habit, pay attention. Get curious. Notice how you're feeling. This is how to nurture mindfulness in any practice. If what you are doing feels good, soak up that feeling, so that your mind and body can integrate this new information, and form new neural pathways connecting the activity to pleasure and wellbeing. If what you're doing feels off, that's important personal data. As you continue to practice your new habit, explore what comes up for you and use it to learn about yourself, and adjust your plan.

If it feels like you took on too much or you're being inconsistent, it's okay. This is often the point where people just give up instead of modifying it to work for where they are at and who they are. Think of it like choosing a weight that was too heavy to lift. You could just give up on lifting weights and never build muscle, or you could scale down and build muscle in a more practical way. Let go of any all-or-nothing failure narratives you might have and work towards your goals in a more sustainable way. Twenty minutes of daily meditation not so practical? Fifteen or 10 minutes might be just right. This is self-compassion in action. (If you could benefit from more self-compassion, the Calm Relationship with Self Series includes a 10-minute guided meditation called Self-Compassion you may find really supportive.)



Take a moment to reflect on what you have noticed or become more aware of in yourself and in your life since beginning your new mindfulness practice.

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CHECK IN WITH YOUR FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY

It can be tempting to keep your goals and intentions to yourself out of fear of failing, but then you rob yourself of accountability, support, encouragement, and connection – everything that makes it much easier to develop a new habit.

Find people you trust and support each other. Share your stories, offer solidarity, cheer each other on, and tap into the strength of community.

If you're looking for mindful online connection, join us in the [Daily Calm Community](#). We'd love to meet you.

Take a moment to write out who you'd like to share your new habit intentions with and what kind of support or encouragement you'd like to ask of them.

A person is standing on the peak of a mountain, looking out over a vast landscape. In the foreground, there is a steep, rocky slope with some dry, yellowish-brown grass. The middle ground features a calm, blue lake that reflects the surrounding mountains. The background consists of more mountain ranges under a clear, light blue sky. The overall scene is peaceful and inspiring.

“When people are ready to, they change.
They never do it before then,
and sometimes they die before they get
around to it. You can’t make them change
if they don’t want to, just like when they
do want to, you can’t stop them.”

— ANDY WARHOL

You are your best and only
change-maker.
We’re cheering for you!

