

HABIT BEGINS AT HOME

Creating a home that enables you to have mindful eating practices. WORDS: MAYA GUDKA

Our home is where we start our day and where we end it. It is generally a constant in our lives. It can be a sanctuary, or a rut, reinforcing our habits and routines, good and bad. Do we consciously use our homes to support our health and energy? Or are we trapped by habits such as zoning out on handheld devices and staying up too late?

For many of us with busy schedules, a lot of our time at home is in the evenings when we are tired and our willpower depleted. We have limited energy to rethink the way we operate in our homes. What if we redesigned our home routines, one by one?

In her book **Better than Before**, Gretchen Rubin talks about the 'Essential Seven' areas that people most want to make changes in: healthy eating & drinking, exercise, finances, rest & relaxation, effectiveness, tidiness, and relationships. Four of these areas do the most to boost feelings of self-control and therefore strengthen all other habits. These are sleep, move, eat & drink right and de-clutter. The good thing is that these habits are intertwined - tweaking one area will likely help another.

In my last article, I focused on de-cluttering. Here I talk about changing our eating & drinking habits. There are countless books, articles and magazines devoted to healthy eating. Let's face it - most of us know what we need to do. Less sugar, more fresh unprocessed food, limit alcohol etc. I certainly knew what I needed to do, but somehow I had largely remained in the same habits for the last 5 years. I wanted to feel confident that I was able to nourish myself, rather than turning to wine and junk food at the first sign of stress. I seemed to have no problem ticking off other goals but just couldn't crack this one.

'Habits mean we don't strain ourselves to make decisions, weigh choices. Life becomes simpler and many daily hassles vanish'

GRETCHEN RUBIN

From comfort eating to mindful eating

So what helped me finally make the changes? Rather than plunging in I made sure I had set up the conditions for success using these principles:

1 MAKE IT FUN

Food plays a huge role in our Asian culture and Asians are good at expressing their love and care for each other through food. Telling a comfort eater that they shouldn't be in love with their food is just not going to cut it. Mindful eating gave me ways to embrace my love of food and creativity - making pretty plates, planning a weekly menu full of foods that get me really excited, and having a conscious kitchen full of nourishing, delicious foods that are ready to throw together.

2 DON'T TRY TO DO EVERYTHING AT ONCE

I allowed myself a period with no other pressing goals - I decided that improving these habits was important enough to take priority.

3 KNOW YOURSELF

Rubin shares 4 personality types that each respond differently to habit formation. What works for you probably won't work for me. However, any self-knowledge about your personality will help. For example how do you approach other areas of your life, what do people say are your strengths and weaknesses? I know from a work personality test that I'm very impulsive. So it makes my life a hundred times easier if the 'yellow stuff' - the sev, gantya and chewdo are not in my eyesight!

4 SHARE

I shared my habit change plans with a few people - my husband, my coach, and a close friend who is a nutrition student. Having these people on hand for the inevitable bumps will provide accountability and support. You may want to take it further and share your progress on an app or social media - I used a private account on Instagram.

5 MAKE IT EASY

I then used the concepts below to take the effort out of the process. They are not about discipline or willpower, they are about making life easier for yourself. Try them - if they worked for me, a breastfeeding (i.e. 'hangry!') new mum of two, I'm sure they will work for you!

6 KNOW YOUR BIGGEST TRIGGERS

I love to have a sweet treat with my afternoon chai or coffee. This ended up being far too many dunked digestives. I knew I needed some accompaniments for my hot drinks so I experimented with some healthy baking and had some healthy treats on hand for these moments. I also love a glass of wine on the sofa after a stressful day, but after one glass all healthy intentions go out of the window, so finding alternatives to this was key to transforming my habits.

WHY NOT TRY:

✦ **Adding some basic baking ingredients to your next online order so you have everything ready when you want to try a new creation**

✦ **There are some amazing no sugar baking recipes out there today - indulgent, nutritious and delicious, they include 'mug cakes' - which are so quick, they satisfy even my impatient nature!**

✦ **Some yummy mocktails as wine alternatives**

✦ **Doing something entirely different - such as an indulgent aromatherapy bath**

Sort out your home environment

Research shows that our environment has a bigger effect on our habits than our individual willpowers. If your habit cues are unchanged, you're making a lot of demands on your willpower. We need to make life easy for ourselves. ➔

Healthy alternative
Try a healthy smoothie with turmeric, vanilla, cinnamon and coconut milk



Healthy alternative
 Try vegetarian quinoa recipe with colourful bell pepper, tomato, onion and fresh herbs

WHY NOT TRY:

- 🍷 Having the fruit bowl on display and the junk food out of reach (or preferably out of the house!). I've really noticed the difference with my daughter who now gets tempted by an orange.
- 🍷 Having healthier snacks ready for weak moments – I love popcorn, dark chocolate or making peanut butter & date smoothies – much better than the magnum ice-creams of the past!
- 🍷 Reconfiguring your 'relaxation areas' - for example, move the sofa from directly facing the TV, as this might encourage mindless munching.

Get organized

Food prep is a big buzzword these days. Preparing ahead helps during busy, hungry times. And systemizing takes the extra decisions away.

WHY NOT TRY:

- 🍷 Chopped veg in the fridge ready for making curry, soup or steaming
- 🍷 Peeling garlic, soaking dahl, cooking bowls of quinoa and brown rice in advance
- 🍷 Overnight oats, a total game changer – they taste fantastic and save so much time in the morning. Simple instructions @mayagudz
- 🍷 A weekly menu – this took me a long time to prepare, but has been transformative. It's full of healthy foods that I love and that work for the family. It also has lots of snacks, ready for my afternoon and post bed-time wine and junk cravings!
- 🍷 Online ordering, diarized – enabling you to have your healthy usuals ordered in 5 minutes

Harness technology

Technology is addictive and distracting. It can also be a great aid in habit change. I spent some time retracing my 'on the sofa' digital journey - rather than Facebook, WhatsApp and email checking, I put the apps that were beneficial to my healthy journey on the first screen of my phone.

WHY NOT TRY:

- 🍷 Logging your food diary on a food app like MyFitnessPal. Research has shown that keeping a food diary alone, without any conscious effort to make changes to the intake, doubles weight loss efforts. Over time it unobtrusively shows you where you can make the most effective changes
- 🍷 Find your type on Instagram. In my case, following mums who were throwing together healthy meals really helped. I couldn't identify with Deliciously Ella or other celebrity chefs who had long complicated recipes and ingredient lists. In fact, when I stopped using Instagram for a while due to a full phone, I found my habits dipped a bit!
- 🍷 The Mindful Eating hypnosis app from Surf City Apps

4 months later, I rarely drink wine alone, I generally have a stash of dark chocolate or home baked stuff with my hot drinks instead of buying cakes or wolfing down the digestives. I'll never be one to hold back or deprive myself when out or at home, but it's reassuring to know that the core of my diet is good for me. With a great system in place I'm making less food decisions and more yummy creations! Next time – we will tackle sleep! 🍷

'When we change our habits, we change our lives'
 GRETCHEN RUBIN



Our expert

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