

Want to adopt a healthy new habit? 'Stack' it



[Kim Painter](#), Special for USA TODAY 1:29 p.m. EDT August 25, 2015



(Photo: Photo Disc)

One recent morning, in the interest of science, I jumped up from my morning cup of coffee to take an allergy pill, eat an apple, check my blood pressure, do five push-ups, climb three flights of stairs, declutter a pile of papers and make a to-do list for the day.

Total elapsed time for my mini-marathon of virtue: 9 minutes.

My slightly sweaty scramble was an extreme version of something variously called habit stacking, chaining, anchoring or piggybacking.

The idea: If I jumped up and did those things every morning after my coffee, they'd soon become as automatic as my caffeine habit. I'd never forget my allergy pill or blood pressure check and I'd start every day with an uncluttered desk and mind.

The power of linking new habits to established routines is well-known by psychologists, marketers and other students of human behavior.

"No behavior happens without a trigger," whether that's a memory, a Post-it note, a time of day or another behavior, says BJ Fogg, a behavior scientist who runs a lab at Stanford University. When you intentionally anchor a new behavior to an old one, he says, you choose the trigger.

Fogg and other habit experts practice what they preach:

- Fogg does push-ups after he pees (at least when he's at home). "This morning, I did a set of 10 and a set of 20," he says. On a typical day, he totals 30 to 50. But a key part of his method, which he markets as Tiny Habits, is starting new habits small. So he started, years ago, with just one push-up after every bathroom break. He suggests people who want to start a flossing habit start with one tooth.
- Wendy Wood, a professor of psychology and business at the University of Southern California, starts her "boring and tedious" physical therapy exercises each evening when she sits down to watch TV. Research shows that "people who are successful at adopting new behaviors are those who piggyback, who tie it to something they are already doing," she says.
- James Clear, a writer and speaker on habit formation, meditates for 60 seconds each morning after brewing his coffee. He also expresses gratitude for one thing each evening when he sits down to dinner at his home in Durham, N.C. While such small doses of mental maintenance may have little immediate effect, he says, "the cumulative effect can be very big."

None of those people advocates stacking multiple new habits on top of old ones. They say it is best to keep things simple and to find individual triggers for each new habit you want to adopt. That minimizes the need for willpower and keeps the mental link between the old and new habits as strong as possible, Wood says.

But S.J. (Steve) Scott, an internet entrepreneur who churns out e-books on productivity, organization and habits, is in the more-is-better camp. In his e-book *Habit Stacking: 97 Small Life Changes that Take Five Minutes or Less*, he suggests stacking up to seven quick habits at a time for maximum effect. That's what I tried. (My verdict: It worked ... for one day.)

Though my efforts to speak with Scott were unsuccessful (perhaps because he was busy with 97 other things), I did find one person who stacks multiple habits and makes it work day after day, year after year.

Courtney Carver, a Salt Lake City blogger and speaker who coaches people on simplifying their lives, says she was never able to find the time to write, meditate, read and walk each day until she bundled those habits into a morning routine triggered by her alarm clock at 5:30 a.m. She says she started with five minutes each of two activities and now devotes 15 to 20 minutes each to writing, meditation and reading. Then she takes a 5-mile walk.

That routine has made a "100% difference" in her life and health, says Carver, who has multiple sclerosis.

One hazard of tying new habits to routines is that routines sometimes fall apart — vacations and illnesses happen, work or school schedules change. When that happens, Carver says, she just starts over with two five-minute habits and rebuilds from there.

That ability to reboot is important, others agree. Some additional tips for making habit-stacking work:

- **Start by looking at your existing routine**, finding the things you do every day — such as brushing your teeth, taking a shower, doing the dinner dishes or closing your laptop at the end of a workday. Those are your potential anchors or triggers.
- **Be specific.** Plans to "drink more water" and "eat an apple a day" probably won't work. Plans to take a sip of water every time you hang up the phone and eat an apple after doing the dishes are better (just make sure you have a bottle of water at your desk and a bowl of apples in your kitchen).
- **Start small.** While some experts take this to extremes (flossing one tooth), others suggest limiting new habits to five minutes or less.
- **Pick new habits you really want to adopt.** Even a strong trigger won't work if you really don't want to do those push-ups.

HOW TO HAVE A HEALTHY FALL

Welcome back, short days, crisp air and colorful leaves. Think of the new season as a fresh start to your healthy habits. Here's how to have your healthiest autumn yet.



Think beyond pies and jack-o-lanterns. The pulp of this fall favorite is dense with vitamins A and C, and its tasty seeds are rich in phytosterols, which may help to lower cholesterol. Try roasted seeds, whole wheat pumpkin bread and so much more.

Get your flu shot. The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each season. Come to the 4th Annual Wellness Event to get yours!

Steer clear of the common cold. Hydrate with tons of water throughout the day, and your immune system will thank you. Pumpkins, yogurt and seaweed are also great immunity boosters.



Head outside. Spending time outdoors increases your vitamin D levels, makes you happier and improves your concentration, according to a Harvard Medical School study.



Get a workout. Take in the changing scenery on a run, hike or a bike ride. Join an intramural league. Want a workout that's less intense? Consider this: for a 150-pound person, 30 minutes of raking leaves, planting and weeding each burn roughly 150 calories.

Scare off those Halloween candy cravings. If you buy candy for trick-or-treaters, buy only enough for the kids and wait until Halloween day to buy candy.



Eat like an athlete on game day. Set out raw veggies and dip instead of chips for Sunday Football.

Buy in-season veggies, such as beets, broccoli and Brussels sprouts. Not to mention cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, eggplant, kale and squash.



Enjoy a healthier Thanksgiving. Start Turkey Day with a protein- and fiber-packed breakfast. Don't mindlessly grab heaps of every dish available. Think through which you could do without, and which you really want-and practice portion control.

Give back. Giving takes many forms, big and small. What better reminder to boost our good deeds than Thanksgiving?

Sources: US News HEALTH

10 TIPS FOR FALL FITNESS

Whether you spent the summer scaling mountains or doing laps at your local lake, exercising doesn't have to end when the first leaf drops. Fall is a great time to harvest a new routine to re-energize your workout. Consider the following tips and get motivated!



1. **ENJOY THE FOLIAGE:** Relish the cooler weather and take advantage of outdoor adventures before the winter rolls in. Research park trails nearby to enjoy a hike or a bike ride amid fall's colorful foliage. Even apple picking or pumpkin gathering is a fun activity that is sure to burn calories.
2. **LAYER UP:** Invest in breathable, moisture-wicking clothing and add layers. Though you may feel chilly at first, your body will quickly warm up once your blood starts pumping so you don't want to overdress either.
3. **BE SAFE:** All early morning or evening exercisers should opt for designated paths or head to the local school track. Wear reflective workout clothes and carry a flashlight to illuminate your path. Bike riders should invest in headlights and blinking tail lights and stay clear of heavy traffic roads.
4. **TAKE A CUE FROM THE KIDS:** As children head back to school this season, remember that you, too, should never stop learning. Try a new fitness class and ask about introductory discounts that may be available at local gyms.
5. **WORK OUT AT HOME:** Even 15-20 minutes is enough time to get in a quick workout—think living room aerobic or a quick dash around the neighborhood.
6. **GET THE RIGHT GEAR:** Challenge your muscles with your own body weight and avoid all that expensive equipment. However, hand weights and resistance bands can be helpful in challenging yourself.
7. **FREEZE THAT GYM MEMBERSHIP:** If you don't have time to get to the gym or would rather spend more time outdoors, see if your gym can freeze your membership for a few months.
8. **SAVOR FALL PRODUCE FOR LESS:** In-season produce is rich in flavor and cheap on your wallet. Try apples, figs, pears, pumpkins, sweet potatoes and winter squash.
9. **BUY A BIKE:** You'll get the best deals on an older model bike with the new models being released this fall.
10. **WEIGH YOURSELF REGULARLY:** Don't overlook extra pounds with bulky clothing. Weigh yourself weekly at most to combat this.

Sources: Huffington Post

What's your
favorite exercise?

Sudoku.



PUMPKIN RAVIOLI

Yield: 6 Servings **Cook Time:** 7 minutes

Nutrition: 162 calories, 5 g fat, 22 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 6 g protein, 505 mg sodium

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup canned pumpkin
 - 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
 - 1/4 teaspoon salt
 - Chopped parsley
 - 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
 - 24 Wonton Wrappers
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 1/2 cup chicken broth
 - 1 1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter
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DIRECTIONS:

1. Boil water in a large saucepan.
 2. Combine 1 cup pumpkin, 1/3 cup parmesan, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/8 teaspoon black pepper.
 3. Spoon about 2 teaspoons pumpkin mixture into center of each wonton wrapper.
 4. Moisten edges of dough with water; bring 2 opposite sides together to form a triangle, pinching edges to seal.
 5. Place ravioli into a large saucepan of boiling water with 1 teaspoon of salt; cook 7 minutes, and drain in colander.
 6. Place 1/2 cup broth and 1 1/2 tablespoons butter in pan; bring to a boil. Add ravioli, tossing to coat. Sprinkle parsley.
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Source: Health Magazine
