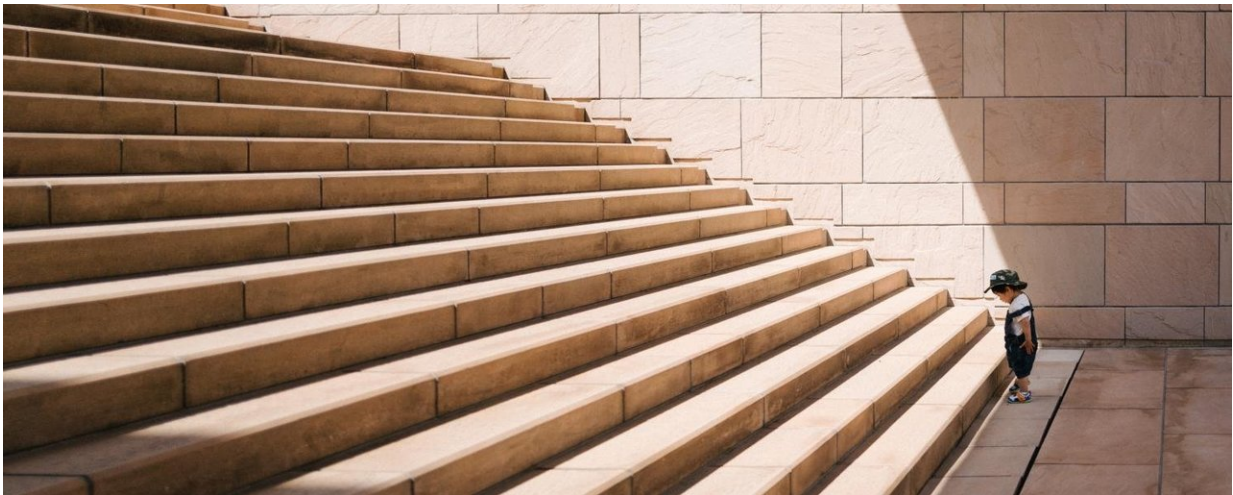


# Building a sustainable lifestyle one habit at a time

February 22 2018

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Credit: University of Colorado at Boulder

Did you make any New Year's resolutions this year? Have they been successful? By about this time of year, research shows that most New Year's resolutions have failed.

Just like New Year's resolutions, making sustainable choices in our lives is essentially about building habits. Now that we know resolutions don't work, what is an effective way to build sustainable habits in our lives?

Whether it's eating less animal products, being certain to recycle, biking

and taking public transportation more often, remembering that reusable mug, learning to grow food or any of the sometimes overwhelming amount of things we can do to decrease our personal carbon footprints, here are five ways the science of creating effective habits can help!

Focus on one habit at a time

[Research suggests willpower is like a muscle](#)—the more you exercise willpower, the more of it you have, and the "willpower muscle" gets tired throughout the day.

Creating or changing a habit requires willpower, so we have to ration and build what we have over time. Trying to start or change many new habits at the same time is like trying to do a triathlon off the couch. A training program is a better idea.

Similarly, if you're looking to make a big change, break it down into smaller steps. Trying to become vegetarian? Start with not eating meat just at breakfast. Once you've mastered that, move to lunch and supper.

## **Start with keystone habits**

According to Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*, a habit is a cognitive 'loop' that is kicked off with a trigger. After you put on your socks, you probably put on your shoes without thinking twice.

Keystone habits, he also describes, are particularly strong habits that can be triggers to keep other habits going. Duhigg suggest we figure out what our keystone habits are and leverage them.

## **Environment is key**

Have you noticed how it's easier to study in the library than near your

bed? Setting up your [environment](#) to encourage the habit literally is setting yourself up for success. Whatever habit you want to start with, think about the changes you can make to your immediate environment and the environments you can stay away from to help you.

Want to start drinking a glass of water when you wake up? Make sure to put one on the nightstand before you go to bed.

This also applies to the social environment you find yourself in—habits can often be social, so hang out with people who have habits you'd like to adopt or who will support you in building new habits for yourself.

## **Get back on the wagon**

Of course we all intend not to "fall off the wagon" with a new habit, but it happens to all of us. When you eat some bacon after resolving to eat vegetarian, remember that it's part of the process. Use it as an opportunity to troubleshoot your strategy—maybe you can make another change in your environment or you need better tools—and recommit yourself to the habit.

## **Give it at least 60 days**

One influential study showed it takes an average of [66 days for a new habit to become automatic](#); that's two months. Plan to put in at least that amount of time and energy consciously choosing the new habit. Stick with it. It will pay off when the [habit](#) and its rewards becomes automatic and you don't have to think about it again.

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

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