

The information contained in these handouts is provided to increase awareness of how hypnosis may help and does not constitute medical expert opinion, diagnosis, or treatment. It is not intended to replace medical care or professional advice from a qualified healthcare provider. If you have any concerns for yourself or loved ones consult with medical and or health providers.

Educational Handout: Habits—How They Form, Why They Matter, and How to Change Them

Definition: What is a habit?

A habit is a behaviour or response that becomes automatic through repetition. Instead of needing conscious effort every time, your brain increasingly runs the behaviour “on autopilot” when certain cues appear.

Common examples:

- Brushing your teeth when you get up
- Reaching for a phone when you’re bored
- Eating a snack when stress spikes
- Taking the same route to work because it feels familiar

How habits develop

Habits typically form through a loop:

1. 2. 3. 4. Cue (trigger): A signal that starts the behaviour

Examples: a time of day, a place, an emotion, a person, a routine, a sensation (stress, hunger).

Craving/urge: Motivation to do the behaviour

You may feel restlessness, desire, or a “need” for relief.

Response (behaviour): The action you take

The habit provides the reward or relief.

Reward: Why the habit sticks

The brain learns: This works. That reinforcement strengthens the habit.

Over time, the cue becomes more powerful and the response becomes more automatic—often even when you later decide you don't want the habit.

What is the purpose of habits?

Habits exist because they help you:

- Save mental energy: Automatic actions require less decision-making
- Handle routine: They make daily life smoother
- Provide relief or reward: Many habits reduce stress, boredom, or discomfort in the s

short term

- Predict outcomes: Your brain prefers familiar patterns

A key point: Habits aren't "bad" by nature. The problem is when the habit's reward no longer matches your goals (e.g., a coping habit that causes harm over time).

Myths about habits (and the truth)

Myth 1: "Habits are character flaws."

Truth: Habits are learned patterns. They can be replaced, not judged away.

Myth 2: "You need motivation to change."

Truth: Motivation helps, but change is often driven by structure: cues, environments, and repeated practice.

Myth 3: "You have to eliminate the old habit completely right away."

Truth: Progress often works best by reducing the old habit and strengthening the new one—especially in high-risk situations.

Myth 4: "If you slip once, you've failed."

Truth: Slips are data. They show what cue and conditions trigger the habit so you can adjust the plan.

Myth 5: "Habits can't change because they're unconscious."

Truth: Even if a habit is automatic, you can interrupt the loop and retrain responses with repetition and new reinforcement.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: How long does it take to change a habit?

It varies. Some people notice improvement in days to weeks, while stronger rewiring can take months. The best predictor is consistency plus a good replacement plan.

Q: What if my habit happens without warning?

That usually means the cue is subtle. Watch for patterns: time, location, mood, who you're with, what happened right before.

Q: Why do I keep repeating the habit even when I don't want to?

Because the habit is meeting a need—relief, comfort, stimulation, routine, or control—even if it creates problems later.

Q: What's the fastest way to start changing?

Identify your top trigger and create a specific alternative response that you can do in that exact moment.

Q: Will I ever be “free” from cravings?

Cravings usually change over time: they often become less intense and less frequent as the new habit becomes familiar and reliable.

Changing habits: an actionable process

Step 1: Identify the habit loop

Write it out:

- Cue: What starts it?
- Urge: What do you feel in your body/mind?
- Response: What do you do?
- Reward: What do you get (relief, pleasure, distraction)?

Step 2: Make the habit harder to trigger

Change the environment:

- Remove easy access (food, apps, items)
- Alter routes/routines
- Reduce exposure to common cues

Step 3: Create a replacement behaviour (not just “don't”)

Choose something that provides a similar need:

- If the cue is stress → replace with breathing, a short walk, journaling, or stretching
- If the cue is boredom → replace with a quick task, playlist + activity, or stepping away

The replacement should be:

- easy to start
- doable within a short window
- repeatable consistently

Step 4: Practice “the interruption moment” Most change happens in the brief pause between cue and response.

Use a cue phrase like: “Pause—choose the new response.”

Then do your replacement action.

Step 5: Reinforce the new habit

Reward yourself for doing the replacement (even small wins). Reinforcement strengthens the new loop.

Step 6: Expect setbacks and use them

If the habit happens:

- Don’t shame yourself
- Note what was different (sleep, stress, location, hunger)
- Adjust your plan for next time

How hypnotherapy can help change habits

Hypnotherapy is often used to support habit change by addressing the mental and emotional drivers that maintain the habit loop. It may help with:

1) Reducing stress and emotional triggers

Helping clients calm the body and mind can reduce the urge that fuels the old habit.

2) Strengthening new responses

Guided suggestions can support a new automatic response, so the mind is more likely to choose the replacement behaviour when cues appear.

3) Building motivation and confidence

Hypnotherapy can help clients access deeper “why” and increase belief that change is

possible.

4) Improving mindful awareness

Sessions can increase your ability to notice the cue earlier—so you catch the urge before it becomes automatic.

5) Rehearsing future behaviour

Imagery and suggestion can help you practice how you'll respond to triggers, making the new pattern easier to enact in real life.

Best results typically come when hypnotherapy is paired with practical habit strategies (cue tracking, environment design, and consistent replacement actions). A simple client worksheet (copy/paste)

My habit:

My main cue (trigger): _____

My urge/feeling: _____

My automatic response: _____

My reward/need: _____

My replacement behaviour:

What I'll change in my environment:

How I'll reward myself: _____

Safety note (when relevant)

If a habit relates to a health condition (e.g., eating disorders, self-harm, substance dependence), it's important to coordinate with appropriate medical or mental health professionals. Wanting support with changing habits contact Brendan Hypnotherapy Online for free consultation.