

The ASCEND Project: Tiny Habits for Self Compassion: Getting Started

Tiny Habits® with Dr. BJ Fogg & Linda Fogg Phillips, M.S. ©2014 BJ Fogg

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You can learn to create habits -- it's a skill

This is all about helping you learn how to create habits in your life quickly and easily.

The ability to create habits is a skill. It's something you can learn, and it's something you can improve with practice. However, you need to practice in the right way. And that's where the Tiny Habits method comes in. That's why BJ Fogg^[1] developed this program.

Often people are discouraged about making new habits .Here's how we see it: A "habit" is a behavior that you do automatically, without thinking about it. The stronger the habit, the more automatically you do the behavior. The most extreme form of a habit is a reflex, like when someone waves their hand in front of your eyes and you blink.

Each day of your life you are strengthening and weakening habits. When you want to improve your life like exercising more, the key is to make helpful behaviors more automatic. Eventually, you want those new behaviors to be reflexes. You don't think about them; you just do them.

What is a "Tiny Habit"^[1]?

As BJ defines it, a "Tiny Habit" is a behavior --

- you do at least **once a day**
- that takes you **less than 30 seconds**
- that requires **little effort**

As you select Tiny Habits for this week, they must follow the rules above.

Simple is powerful. You'll see that this week. Later, you can expand the simple behavior (for example, expand from taking one deep calming breath to doing a several minute breathing exercise). But for this week, please, please keep it simple. **Tiny is better.**

^[1] [Tiny Habits: The Small Changes that Change Everything](#) by BJ Fogg. Copyright © 2019

Examples of recipes for Tiny Habits

Below are some examples that fit the Tiny Habits format -- BJ calls this a "recipe." Note how the recipe follows this template:

After I [existing routine], **I will** [new tiny behavior].

- **After** stepping into the shower, **I will** pay attention to the feeling of the water on my body.
- **After** taking the first sip of coffee into my mouth in the morning, **I will** savor the tastes and feelings in my mouth.
- **After** stepping out of the house in the morning, **I will** take in the sights, sounds, and smells of the new day.

Typically, in clinic

- **After** turning on the faucet, **I will** immerse myself in the experience of washing my hands
- **After** reaching the exam room door, **I will** stop to take a deep, relaxing breath

If you don't know what to select for this week, just choose from the set above -- or mix and match as you see fit.

Focus on tiny habits, don't go for something big

The most likely mistake people will make this week is picking behaviors that are too hard. Instead of meditating for three breaths, someone will pick meditate for 10 minutes. We see this mistake often. There's a reason for it.

Right now, you're feeling motivated, so you're feeling capable of meditating for 10 minutes. But please believe us: These difficult behaviors will not become habits unless you start them out as tiny. So, remember, **tiny is better**.

Tiny Habits should be super easy to do

Why? Because the easier the behavior, the less it depends on motivation. "Hey!" you might say. "What's wrong with motivation?" Well, motivation is not very reliable, going up and down, often unpredictably. And it often takes a lot of work to sustain motivation. **Relying on motivation to create a habit doesn't work very well.**

Tiny behaviors that work for many people . . .

- Telling myself, "It's going to be a good day."
- Taking one deep, relaxing breath
- Looking at a photo of someone I love.

Seriously, can taking one deep, relaxing breath help you practice self-compassion? The answer is YES. As you succeed in making taking one deep, relaxing breath a habit, a lot of good things will happen naturally in your life. **A new healthy habit boosts your confidence and your ability. It creates what BJ calls “success momentum.”** The positive effects will ripple out to other parts of your life.

Find the right spot in your life: a strong ANCHOR behavior

Just as important as keeping the behavior tiny is this: Finding the right spot in your daily routine for your new behavior.

In this method, you tie the new tiny behavior **after** a habit you already do. This existing habit should be something you always do. BJ calls the existing habit an “anchor.” In this method, you use your existing anchor to remind you to do the new tiny behavior you want.

This idea of “after” is important. We believe you won’t form a new habit until you know what the new behavior comes **after** in your life. You need to know what anchor can trigger it. So, give this some thought. Where is the right place for the new tiny behavior you want in your life? What **does it come after**? In other words, what is the right anchor for you?

As you select your anchor, pick one that is precise. A fuzzy moment doesn’t work. For example, “After I finish dinner . . . ” is not a good anchor because there’s no precise moment when dinner is done. **Find a specific moment in your routine**, such as “After I take my plate into the kitchen.”

Anchors that work well . . .

You can choose your own anchors, but here are a few that work well for many people:

- After I put my feet on the floor when I wake up, I will . . .
- After I step out of the shower, I will . . .
- After I tie my shoes, I will . . .
- After I put on my glasses, I will . . .
- After I put my head on the pillow to go to sleep, I will. . .

Mindset: Practice & Revise

The mindset you should have this week is this: Practice & Revise.

You should not try to be perfect. You won’t likely nail all your recipes for Tiny Habits the first time you try. For example, you might pick a tiny behavior that’s not tiny enough. Or maybe the

match between your anchor and tiny behavior isn't good. That's okay. Just revise and keep going.

Frankly, we worry about people that don't revise at all during the week. We suspect they are forcing a fit between an anchor and a tiny behavior. **If the recipe doesn't "click," then consider revising.** Just write down the new recipe for yourself.

Remembering to do your Tiny Habits

The more you practice creating habits, the easier it is to have an existing routine in your life (an anchor) trigger a new behavior you want. Your brain will get better at pairing anchors and tiny behaviors. You won't need an artificial reminder. **The stronger the anchor, the more likely you will do the new habit.** If you forget, then think about choosing a different anchor behavior.

Another way to help remember your Tiny Habits is by rehearsing the sequence a few times. Take a few minutes and act out the sequence (anchor, then tiny behavior) 5 to 8 times in a row. This seems to get your brain wired to remember.

In rehearsing your sequence, you also celebrate each time. Why? Because emotion wires your brain to remember. In other words, the **more emotion you feel when you celebrate (I'm awesome!), the faster the new behavior will become a habit.**

So, the sequence looks like this:

Anchor → Tiny Behavior → Celebrate it!

Celebrate success: rapid and robust

Please read this section carefully. This is how you make the behavior become automatic: You celebrate it.

Each time you do your new Tiny Habit, you need to celebrate your success immediately. Perhaps you say "You go!" to yourself. Or say "I'm awesome" or whatever works for you. Feel the emotion of success. Perhaps you can think, "If nothing else goes right today, I at least did this one thing right. Good for me!"

Again, we know this may sound goofy, but it works. In BJ's method you need to celebrate; you need to feel good about doing your Tiny Habit. Why? Because you are reinforcing yourself.

Emotions cause habits. **When you do a behavior and feel a positive emotion about it, your brain pays attention.** It essentially thinks, "Wow, that felt good. I want to do that behavior again!"

But wait, there's more: The stronger the emotion, the more deeply your brain rewires. The more skilled you are at celebration, the faster you can create habits.

How do you celebrate?

There are many ways to celebrate. You need to find what works for you—what makes YOU feel positive, uplifted, successful, and happy. You might say to yourself, "Good for me!" or you might do a fist pump and say "Yes!" out loud or think "I'm awesome."

Scenario #1^[1]: You're sitting at work. You have a piece of paper to recycle, and the recycling bin is in the far corner of the room. You decide to wad up the paper and throw it; you are not sure you'll make it. You aim carefully and toss the paper. Up it goes into an arc and it vanishes into the bin — perfect shot! What do you do at that moment?

Scenario #2: Your favorite sports team is in the championship game. The score is tied and as the time on the clock runs out, your team scores — and wins the championship. What do you do at that moment?

The stronger you feel a positive emotion after your Tiny Habit, the faster it will become automatic in your life. (Please reread that last sentence.)

If you forget to do your new tiny behavior, that means you are not celebrating deeply enough.

The key is to practice (in the right way)

Have fun this week. Remember that you are practicing, and that means you will probably need to revise your recipes for Tiny Habits. Many people will need to make the new behaviors simpler. Others will need to find a better anchor to remind them of the new behavior. Some will resist celebrating, and eventually learn this is essential. Learning these things is all part of the process.

With the right practice, you can almost always succeed in creating a new Tiny Habit. You will know how to make the behavior tiny and how to sequence it after the right anchor. And you know how to celebrate -- to feel positive emotions. These are the key skills we're teaching you this week.

Yes, you CAN learn this method. And we think you'll find the process fun and fascinating.

Remember the recipe:

AFTER I . . . (strong anchor behavior) **THEN** I will (for example, take a deep relaxing breath) and **CELEBRATE** {"I'm awesome.")(rapid, robust celebration)