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Edition

HABIT STACKING QUICK START GUIDE



GET STARTED WITH THIS COMPLETE
SET OF CHECKLISTS AND HABIT IDEAS

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3 Types of Habits (and Why Each Is Important)

Not all habits are equal.

The mistake people make is they don't take the time to understand what it takes to build habits. It's important to create a distinction between the different habits that you're trying to form.

Specifically, when it comes to habit stacking, I feel there are three types of habits that you should add to a routine:

1. Keystone habits
2. Support habits
3. Elephant habits

1. Keystone Habits

A keystone habit can have a positive impact on multiple areas of your life—even if you're not intentionally trying to improve them.

2. Support Habits

Not every habit can be a priority. In fact, you can only focus on a handful of keystone habits before you'll feel overwhelmed, which is why it's important to form "support habits." These habits support the achievement of an important keystone habit.

3. Elephant Habits

The idea here is that whenever you're faced with a large, complex goal, all you need to do is chip away at it in small chunks using elephant habits.

9 Rules to Build a Habit Stacking Routine

1. Attach the stack to an existing habit.

The simplest way to remember a stack is to do it right before or after a habit. This should be something you do without fail, every single day—like eating, brushing your teeth, or checking your phone. This is important because you're going to piggyback on this habit by creating what's called an "if-then plan."

2. Complete each habit in five minutes or less (usually).

I recommend five minutes because it's a basic unit of time in which you can accomplish a surprising number of things, while being short enough that you can stack each action on top of another.

3. The entire routine should take under thirty minutes.

The "thirty-minute rule" is a sweet spot where you can complete many habits without it interfering with everything else in your life. You'd be surprised at many "little things" can be squeezed into a half hours' time.

4. Build daily, weekly, and monthly stacks.

My advice is simple: not only should you build daily stacks, but you should also schedule time once a week and once a month to complete those important but not urgent activities.

For the weekly review, you could schedule this activity late Sunday night as a way to prepare for the workweek.

And for the monthly review, you could schedule it for the first Saturday of each month.

9 Rules to Build a Habit Stacking Routine

5. Each small habit should be a complete action.

There should be an obvious starting and stopping point. You should avoid habits where you could easily do more of it if you had time (like exercising, writing, or anything related to your job). It's better to schedule these activities for a different part of the day when you can devote more time.

There is one major exception to this rule. You could add the occasional “elephant habit” to your daily stack to make forward progress on an unpleasant task.

6. Pick simple-to-complete activities.

Each small action should be easy to complete without requiring a lot of brainpower. Do it quickly and then immediately move on to the next action.

7. Map out a logical progression for each routine.

The entire routine should flow like a well-oiled machine. This is key because you want to avoid wasting time and moving from room to room.

8. Use a checklist to manage the process.

A stack should be a set of actions that you determine ahead of time that are personally important. This means putting each habit into a step-by-step checklist that you'll refer to constantly. This checklist should be a set of actions done the same way, in the same order each day.

9 Rules to Build a Habit Stacking Routine

9. Include habits that relate to your priorities.

Remember, the benefit of habit stacking is to take action on your important, personal goals. These should be outcomes you want to achieve—not what others want from you.

The simplest way to identify habits is to make sure they relate to a goal from one of these seven areas:

1. Career
2. Finance
3. Health
4. Organizing
5. Passions
6. Relationships
7. Spirituality

13 Steps for Building a Habit Stacking Routine

Step 1: Start with a Five-Minute Block

Start with five minutes, picking one or two habits, and then add more as this routine becomes an automatic action.

Step 2: Focus on Small Wins

Build your routine around habits that don't require a lot of effort and willpower. These are the small wins that will build "emotional momentum" because they're easy to remember and complete.

Step 3: Pick a Time and Location

Every stack should be anchored to a trigger related to a location, time of day, or combination of both.

Step 4: Anchor Your Stack to a Trigger

There are two basic types of triggers.

1. *External triggers* (like a cell phone alarm, a push notification, or a Post-it note on your refrigerator) work because they create a Pavlovian response that when the alarm goes off, you complete a specific task.

2. *Internal triggers* are the feelings, thoughts, and emotions that you relate to an established habit. These are like a scratch that you must itch.

13 Steps for Building a Habit Stacking Routine

Step 5: Create a Logical Checklist

It should include the sequence of the actions, how long it takes to complete each one, and where you'll do them.

Step 6: Be Accountable

You need accountability to stick to a major goal. It's not enough to make a personal commitment.

1. *Coach.me* is a great tool for maintaining and sticking to new habits. It's like having a coach in your pocket, both for better and worse.
2. Having an *accountability partner* with whom you share your breakthroughs, challenges, and future plans is a great way to get a kick in the butt whenever you feel a wane in motivation, and someone you can confide in whenever you have a challenge that requires a second opinion.

Step 7: Create Small, Enjoyable Rewards

Giving yourself a reward can be a great motivator to complete a daily routine. This can include anything, like watching your favorite TV show, eating a healthy snack, or even relaxing for a few minutes, but avoid any reward that eliminates the benefit of a specific habit.

Check out: [155 Ways to Reward Yourself](#)

13 Steps for Building a Habit Stacking Routine

Step 8: Focus on Repetition

Repetition is key for the first few weeks when building a stack. It's crucial that you stick to the routine—even if you must skip one or two small actions.

Consistency is more important than anything else. Repetition builds muscle memory. And when you complete the routine often enough, it'll become an ingrained part of your day.

Step 9: Don't Break the Chain

Jerry Seinfeld's advice: Set aside time every day to create new material.

The key here is to never miss a day, even if you're not in the mood.

Create a doable daily goal that can be achieved no matter what happens, and don't let yourself be talked out of it.

Perhaps you'll set a small goal where you only complete two or three actions. The important thing is to set a goal that can be achieved even when you have an off day.

Step 10: Expect Setbacks

Even the most consistent habits will experience the occasional setback or challenge. You should expect challenges to come up with this routine. When they do, you have one of two choices: give up or find a way to overcome them.

13 Steps for Building a Habit Stacking Routine

Step 11: Schedule the Frequency of a Stack

As we've discussed before, some stacks only need to be completed on an irregular basis:

- I. Daily
- II. Weekly
- III. Monthly

At first, you should get started with a small daily habit stack. But as you become comfortable with the strategy, create a stack for each of the above three times.

Step 12: Scale Up Your Stack

Do this in an incremental manner. In the first week, your routine will last five minutes. The second week will be ten minutes, then up fifteen minutes for week three. Repeat this process until the routine is thirty minutes with a handful of small actions.

Step 13: Build One Routine at a Time

You shouldn't try to build more than one habit at a time because each additional new action will make it increasingly difficult to stick with your stacks.

When you feel that a stack has become a permanent behavior, that is when you can add a new habit to your daily routine.

127 Small Actions

CAREER HABITS

1. Schedule Your Day
2. Identify Your Three Most Important Tasks (MITs)
3. Review Your Goals
4. Do the Hardest Task First
5. Chunk Down a Project (or Task) into Manageable Steps
6. Remove Distractions Before Working
7. Create a Distraction-Free Environment
8. Declutter Your Desktop
9. Improve Focus by Playing Music
10. Update Your Accountability Partner
11. Reward Yourself for Completing a Task
12. Track Time for Your Activities
13. Work in Pomodoro Blocks
14. Write a “Done List”
15. Identify One Task to Delegate or Outsource
16. Automate Your Work
17. Unsubscribe from an Email List(s)
18. Research One “Side Hustle”
19. Make One Business Connection
20. Review HARO for Business Promotion Opportunities

127 Small Actions

FINANCE HABITS

21. Track Your Expenses
22. Review Your Financial Situation
23. Review Your Budget
24. Check Your Billing Statements
25. Negotiate a Lower Price
26. Find Coupons for Necessities
27. Conserve Your Utilities
28. Pack a Meal, Snack, and Coffee
29. Scan “Garage Sale” Facebook Groups
30. Buy for Value
31. Comparison Shop for a Major Purchase
32. Plan Your Meals
33. Prepare a Food Shopping List (and Stick to It!)
34. Plan Your Daily Errands
35. Unsubscribe from Catalogs and Junk Mail
36. Find Something Free to Do
37. Skip the Commercials
38. Set Up Automatic Withdrawals
39. Read a Personal Finance Article

127 Small Actions

HEALTH HABITS

40. Weigh Yourself
41. Maintain a Food Journal
42. Replace One Food Item
43. Take Daily Vitamins
44. Prepare a Smoothie Drink
45. Fill a 32-Ounce Water Bottle
46. Wear a Step-Tracking Device
47. Walk Between Blocks of Focused Effort
48. Complete a 7-Minute Workout
49. Jump Rope
50. Complete “Deskercise” Routine
51. Increase Your Flexibility
52. Practice Good Posture
53. Meditate
54. Follow a “Shut Down” Routine
55. Use the Sleep Cycle App
56. Connect Your Location to Beeminder
57. Apply Sunscreen Year Round
58. Eliminate Bacteria in Your Kitchen
59. Sneeze into Your Arm, Not Your Hands
60. Perform a Safety Check

127 Small Actions

LEISURE HABITS

61. Practice Self-Education
62. Connect with “Celebrities” in Your Industry
63. Read a Book Chapter
64. Read a Summary of the World News
65. Learn a New Word
66. Draw in a Coloring Book
67. Do a Quick Doodle or Sketch
68. Work on a Puzzle (or Crossword Puzzle)
69. Get Outside
70. Watch an Inspiring Video
71. Add to Your “Bucket List”
72. Add to Your “Soon List”
73. Try Something New
74. Enjoy a Distraction

127 Small Actions

ORGANIZING HABITS

75. Fix Your Broken Windows
76. Make Your Bed
77. Clean One Refrigerator Shelf
78. Leave Shoes at the Door
79. Identify a “Home Base” for Every Possession
80. Put Away Three Items
81. Eliminate One Item
82. Clean Your Office Desk
83. File Away Loose Paperwork
84. Scan your Paperwork
85. Use a Standard File Naming Convention
86. Declutter your Smart Phone
87. Maintain a Cloud-Based To-Do List
88. Store Your Great Ideas
89. Follow a “Getting Out the Door” Routine
90. Say “No”

127 Small Actions

RELATIONSHIP HABITS

91. Do an Activity That Makes You Happy
92. Introduce Yourself to Someone New
93. Contact One Person on a Dating Site
94. Give a Compliment
95. Hug One Person
96. Text an Encouraging Message
97. Leave a Caring Note
98. Return Calls and Text Messages Within 24 Hours
99. Check Your Social Schedule
100. Share Something Inspiring
101. Learn a New Joke
102. Research a Fun Activity
103. Know What Your Significant Other Likes
104. Pause Before Discussing Sensitive Topics
105. Outline Your Thoughts Before a Difficult Conversation
106. Pause to Control Your Anger
107. Practice Active Listening
108. Photograph Important People (and Events)

127 Small Actions

SPITITUALITY HABITS

109. Speak Words of Affirmation
110. Speak Words of Prayer
111. Practice Gratitude
112. Practice Deep Breathing
113. Practice Progressive Relaxation
114. Squeeze a Stress Ball
115. Practice Creative Visualization
116. Let Go of Regret
117. Shower Meditation
118. Practice Mindful Walking
119. Practice Aromatherapy
120. Drink a Calming Beverage (Like Tea)
121. Dress for Success
122. Practice Random Acts of Kindness
123. Serve Others
124. Schedule a Volunteering Activity
125. Donate to a Charitable Organization
126. Practice Recycling
127. Commit to Conservation-Friendly Activities