



Tool

Habits cheat sheet

SOURCE: Adapted from James Clear, *Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results*.

PURPOSE:

When a behaviour has become habitual through repetition we no longer have to remember to do it instead it has become embedded subconsciously and we are therefore more likely to do it. Creating change might involve breaking 'bad' habits and/ or creating new 'good' ones. But as you may have discovered if you've ever set yourself a New Year's Resolution to yoga every day or to stop eating so many crisps, sticking to new habits and breaking old ones isn't easy. James Clear's book on habits includes this handy 'cheat sheet' with tips about Making and Breaking Habits.

HOW TO USE THE TOOL:

The 'cheat sheet' offers tips to create good habits, and break bad habits, each linked to one of the 4 'laws' based on research into the psychology of motivation. The good news is you don't need to use all these techniques – it's a range of options not a checklist of everything you need to succeed.

Creating a good habit

Make it obvious	Simply write down what you want to do somewhere you will see it and be reminded. Be specific about when and where you will do the habit – and what specifically you will do. 'Stack' your habits – if there's something you already do regularly then 'add' your new habit directly before or afterwards to remind you. Design your environment to include cues to remind you of the new habit and its benefits.
Make it attractive	Try 'temptation bundling': pair your new habit with something you want to do. Surround yourself with people where the desired behaviour is the norm. Create a ritual: do something you enjoy directly before a difficult good habit.
Make it easy	Decrease the number of steps between you and the good habit. Prime the environment to make future actions easier. Bite-sized chunks: downscale the new habit into something that can be done in two minutes or less. Automate – invest in onetime purchases or technology that can lock in future behaviour.
Make it satisfying	Reinforce with a reward immediately after completing the habit. Track your habits – create a 'streak' you won't want to break Never miss twice – when you forget, make sure you get back on track immediately.

For example, if I wanted to run regularly here are some of the ways I'd help myself create this good habit:

1. I'd **make it easy** for myself by laying out my running kit the night before and getting dressed for a run as soon as I got up. I'd also schedule my run first thing in the morning as less likely to be side-tracked by work than if I planned to go at lunchtime.
2. I'd **make it attractive** by arranging to run with a friend and choosing longer runs in more scenic locations.
3. I'd **make it obvious** by entering a race for which I would need to train.
4. I'd **make it satisfying** by tracking my time for Park Run each week using a tool like Strava (an online training diary) so I could see how my times were improving with practice. I could also treat myself to a slap up brunch after my long run on Sunday mornings.

How to break bad habits

Make it invisible	Remove temptation. Remove the cues of your bad habits from your environment.
Make it unattractive	Reframe how you look at that habit – highlight the benefits of avoiding the habit.
Make it difficult	Increase the number of steps between you and the bad habit.
Make it unsatisfying	Find an accountability partner – someone who cares about your outcome and will help you stay on track. Make the consequences of your bad habits public and painful.

If I wanted to eat less junk food, so I could run faster, then here are some of the ways I might avail myself of the research to give myself the best chance of success:

1. Let's make sure if I have any biscuits in for guests that I can't see them when I'm making a cup of tea – I can **make it invisible** by moving those biscuits into a different cupboard I don't use so often so I'm not tempted.
2. If I am tempted to eat junk food I'll imagine carrying a couple of extra kilos in my rucksack when I'm climbing a mountain – that will **make it unattractive**.
3. The simplest way to **make it difficult** would be to remove temptation completely by not having any junk food in the house so I'd need to walk to the shop when peckish.
4. I might also think about creating a penalty if I succumb, such as donating £1 to a charity for every biscuit – it would **make it unsatisfying** if I had to part with my hard-earned funds.