

Master Willpower by Removing Cues & Triggers

Many people want to make changes to their life or stories but find it hard not to go back the old patterns and habits that create their old story. Many people think that they should have the willpower to make the changes. However, willpower alone—self-control, resisting temptation—doesn't work. Our brain works with triggers and cues and these make it hard for us to make changes when we are constantly trying to fight the brain on what it has already learned it should be doing. This is why we have to build our willpower muscle. However, it is also important to recognize that we have to help our willpower because it is not usually enough. For example, researcher and psychologist Dr. Roy Baumeister has demonstrated that to build our willpower muscle we first have to develop awareness of things we want to change and then develop strategies for minimizing the cues that trigger the brain, making willpower challenging.

It is important to **minimize cues and trigger** when you are making life change, breaking habits or creating new stories. Otherwise these cues in our everyday environment will pull us toward continuing our old patterns. This is why many studies have shown that it is easier to start or break a habit when we are on vacation or in a new environment. For example, they did a study in which college students that watched too much TV were moved to a different campus. What they found was that the students that had the same furniture (and TV) layout in their new dorm as they had in their old one, just continued the pattern of watching excessive TV. However, those that had the TV and furniture moved to a completely different location were able to change their habit and had more success. Why? Because they were able to change their cues and triggers. The good news is you can experiences these same benefits by moving around furniture in your environment, without having to move or go on vacation.

Don't leave it up to willpower: It is important to recognize that willpower is like a muscle, and that if we over rely on that muscle we may find it harder to resist triggers and therefore fail to create change. Dr. Roy Baumeister, a psychologist at Florida State University conducted studies on decision-making and willpower and concluded “self-control is like a muscle and that if you *over exert* the muscle it gets tired.” You can try to will yourself to make changes, but temptations will drain you and make it harder for you to be able to make long-term changes.

Build Your Willpower Muscle

Your willpower “muscle” is just like any other muscle—when you give it regular workouts, it grows stronger. The problem is that most people believe that willpower is that in-the-moment feat of self-control against an overwhelming craving or temptation. Exercising your willpower does not mean flexing your ability to torture yourself by sitting in front of warm, off-limits brownies. It does not mean telling yourself you are going to quit smoking and then hang around smokers at lunch. This does not work. True willpower comes when preparation meets commitment. Here is how you build your willpower muscle:

Commitment: make a clear-minded decision of what you will or will not do based on a clear understanding of why you want to do it and what will happen if you don't.

What have you decided you will or will not do?

Preparation: Do not expect yourself to be able to resist temptation in the moment. Be prepared!
What do you need to do to be prepared?

- Do you need any materials or equipment?
- Do you need to change your schedule?
- Do you need to remove anything from your home?
- Are there scenarios or locations or people you need to avoid or be prepared to face with a pre-determined statement of why you will or won't be doing something?

If you want to utilize your willpower to stop eating chips, don't buy them and throw out any that are in your home. If you want to do 100 sit-ups a day, don't leave it up to how you feel in the moment—set an alarm, have your mat already in the right position, and commit to do it when the alarm goes off **NO MATTER WHAT**.

Regularly practicing different types of self-control: It has also been shown that if you practice self-control on smaller things can build your muscle. For example, waiting to check your social media, portion control on unhealthy snacks, keeping a food diary, not responding to someone's comment that triggers you emotionally, sitting up straight, or any other thing that will force you to practice self-control

Visualize if you can mentally project yourself into the future of a situation that is a trigger and you can see yourself with a new pattern or behavior can start giving the brain a new framework. In other words, you can break a pattern in your mind and by doing so you can break it when you are exposed to the thing in real life. Visualization is also powerful because it has been shown in studies that people who can strongly identify with their new story have much better self-control

Self-Trust: To successfully break an old pattern we have to trust yourself that we will follow through because if not then we will sabotage yourself. For example, if you are able to resist temptation of hitting the snooze button in the morning your brain will recognize it and see it as evidence that you can make changes to your patterns. The more evidence your brain has that you can create new patterns the easier it becomes to make changes.

So, how do you **PROVE IT**?

Well it may be difficult at first to trust yourself that you will take a massive leap of change. Therefore you can follow the steps below so that you build momentum.

- 1) Choose a simple behavior change that you are 100% that you will follow through with.
- 2) Keep at it until you create a new habit.
- 3) As you gain confidence, increase the difficulty of that you are trying to change.

Remember that the more you can give your brain evidence the easier it becomes. Do that simple change until to become part of your DNA (Daily Natural Action).

So ask yourself:

What can I do to minimize my cues and triggers?

What small change can I start off with that will help me gain confidence?