

The Habit Stack Worksheet

Attach the habit you want to something you already do without thinking — and stop relying on motivation to carry it.

Most habits fail at the same point. Not at week six when it gets boring, but on day two, at the moment you were supposed to remember. The intention was real. The trigger was missing.

Habit stacking fixes that by borrowing a trigger you already have. You do dozens of things every day without deciding to — the kettle, the toothbrush, the seatbelt, closing the laptop. Each of those is a reliable cue looking for a job.

The formula: After I [existing habit], I will [new habit]. That is the whole method. The work is in choosing the anchor well and keeping the new habit small enough that the anchor can actually pull it.

Step one — map your anchors

Write down what you already do reliably, at roughly the same time, without deciding to. Reliability matters far more than importance. A good anchor happens whether or not you slept badly.

Time of day	Things I already do without thinking
First 30 minutes awake	
Morning routine	
Arriving somewhere	
Mid-day / lunch	
Finishing work	
Evening	
Last 30 minutes before bed	

Aim for at least fifteen anchors. People typically stop at six and pick a weak one because the list was short. Kettle on, phone off charger, sitting down at the desk, closing the laptop, brushing teeth, locking the door, feeding a pet — these are all anchors.

Step two — shrink the habit

The most common mistake is stacking something too big. An anchor can pull a two-minute habit reliably. It cannot pull a forty-minute one, and when it fails you conclude that habit stacking does not work rather than that the load was wrong.

Instead of	Stack this
Do a 30-minute workout	Put on trainers and do five minutes
Meditate for 20 minutes	Take ten slow breaths sitting down
Cook every meal from scratch	Chop one vegetable while the kettle boils
Drink 3 litres of water	Fill and drink one glass
Journal every evening	Write one line about the day
Read for an hour	Read one page

Once the stack is automatic — usually two to four weeks — the habit tends to grow on its own, because starting was the hard part. Deliberately keeping it small at the beginning is not lowering the bar; it is the mechanism.

Step three — build the stack

Write the sentence out in full for each habit. Vague stacks fail: "after breakfast, exercise" has no specific moment in it. "After I put my breakfast plate in the sink, I will do five minutes of stretching in the kitchen" does.

#	After I...	I will...	Where
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

Step four — check each stack against four tests

1. **Is the anchor genuinely automatic?** If you sometimes forget the anchor itself, it cannot carry anything.
2. **Do they happen in the same place?** A stack that requires moving to another room fails far more often. Keep it where the anchor already puts you.
3. **Does the timing actually match?** If the anchor happens when you are rushing out of the door, nothing fits after it.
4. **Is the new habit under two minutes to start?** Not to complete — to start. Starting is the whole battle.

One stack at a time for the first fortnight. Six new stacks at once is six new things to remember, which is exactly the problem habit stacking exists to solve. Add the second only once the first happens without effort.

Step five — track it honestly for two weeks

Tick the days it happened. The purpose is not discipline, it is diagnosis: the pattern of misses tells you what to change.

Stack	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S

Reading the misses

Missed on the same weekday each time? The anchor does not exist that day. That day needs a different anchor, not more resolve.

Missed when the day ran late? The habit is too big, or the anchor sits too late in the day. Move it earlier or shrink it.

Remembered but skipped? The trigger is working and the habit is wrong — either too unpleasant or not actually something you want. Change the habit, not the system.

Simply forgot? The anchor is not as automatic as you thought. Go back to your list and pick a stronger one.

Restarting after you break the chain

You will miss days. The people who keep habits are not the ones who never break the chain; they are the ones who restart without treating the break as a verdict.

The useful rule is to never miss twice. One missed day is noise. Two consecutive missed days is where the stack quietly stops existing, because the anchor starts firing without the habit attached and relearns that pairing.

Twelve stacks that work for most people

Use these as starting points rather than a prescription — the anchor half matters more than the habit half, so swap in an anchor you actually have.

After I...	I will...
put the kettle on	fill a glass of water and drink it
sit down at my desk	write the three things that matter today
close my laptop	write one line about how the day went
brush my teeth at night	lay out tomorrow morning clothes
pour my first coffee	take ten slow breaths before drinking it
put my breakfast plate in the sink	stretch for five minutes
take my shoes off at the door	put my keys and phone in the same place
finish lunch	walk once round the block
get in the car	set the phone face down out of reach
put the shopping away	plan one meal for later in the week
feed the pet	take any daily medication or supplement
turn off the bedroom light	name one thing that went right today

Stacking a habit you want to stop

The same mechanism works in reverse, with one change: you cannot remove a habit by willpower at the moment of the cue, but you can attach a competing action to the same trigger.

- **Find the real cue.** Not "I snack too much" but "when I close the laptop, I go to the kitchen." The cue is closing the laptop.
- **Attach something to that exact cue** that occupies the same first thirty seconds — filling a glass of water, stepping outside, changing rooms.
- **Make the old path slower.** Not impossible, just slower. Distance and friction do more work here than resolve.
- **Expect the cue to keep firing** for a few weeks. That is normal and not a sign of failure — you are overwriting a pairing, not deleting one.

Why this works when resolutions do not

A resolution asks you to remember, decide and act, all at a moment you have not specified. Each of those is a place to fail, and by the third day the deciding has usually stopped happening.

A stack removes the first two. The anchor does the remembering, and the decision was made once, in advance, when you wrote the sentence. All that is left at the moment itself is the doing — and if the habit is genuinely small, the doing is rarely the hard part.

That is also why shrinking matters so much. Every extra minute you ask of the new habit puts more load on an anchor that can only pull so much.

If a stack keeps failing, change the anchor before you change your mind about the habit. Nine times out of ten the habit was fine and the trigger was unreliable.

Keep going

Health Improvement Guru has more free tools for building routines that hold — including the 7-Day Energy Reset Protocol and the Health Starter Checklist.

Not medical advice. This worksheet covers general habit-formation and lifestyle routine only. It is not medical, psychological, nutritional or therapeutic advice, and is not a substitute for care from a qualified professional. If you are managing a health condition, or experiencing persistent low mood, fatigue or sleep problems, speak to a doctor before making changes to your routine.