

ARTICLES([HTTPS://JAMESCLEAR.COM/ARTICLES](https://jamesclear.com/articles))

BOOKS([HTTPS://JAMESCLEAR.COM/BOOKS](https://jamesclear.com/books))

3-2-1 NEWSLETTER([HTTPS://JAMESCLEAR.COM/3-2-1](https://jamesclear.com/3-2-1))

JAMES CLEAR

EVENTS([HTTPS://JAMESCLEAR.COM/EVENTS](https://jamesclear.com/events))

ABOUT([HTTPS://JAMESCLEAR.COM/ABOUT](https://jamesclear.com/about))

HABITS ACADEMY→([HTTPS://HABITSACADEMY.COM/](https://habitsacademy.com/))

How to Build a New Habit: This is Your Strategy Guide

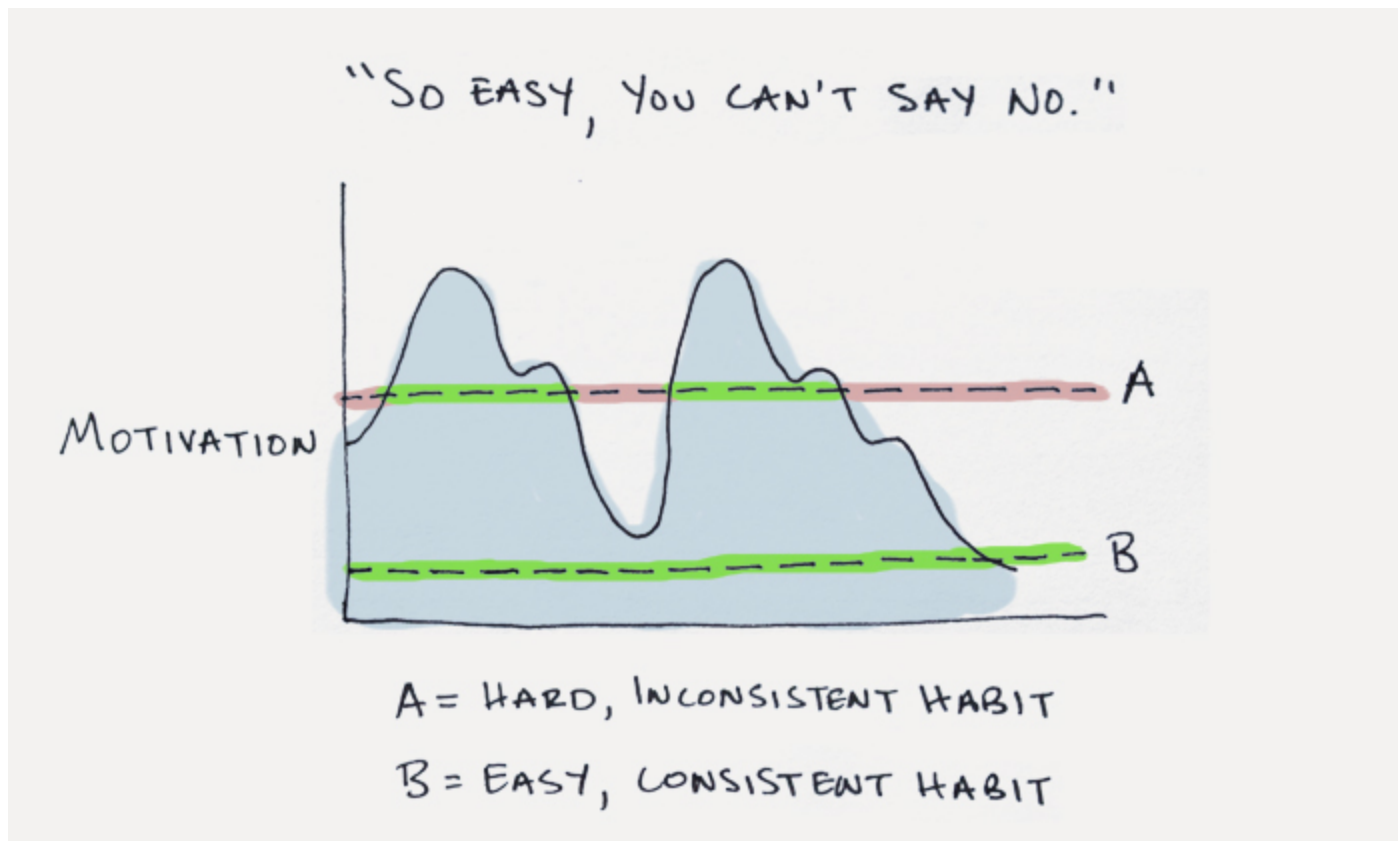
According to researchers at Duke University, habits account for about 40 percent of our behaviors on any given day. Understanding how to build new habits (and how your current ones work) is essential for making progress in your health, your happiness, and your life in general.

But there can be a lot of information out there and most of it isn't very simple to digest. To solve this problem and break things down in a very simple manner, I have created this strategy guide for how to build new habits that actually stick.

Even more detailed information is available in my book, *Atomic Habits* (<https://jamesclear.com/atomic-habits>).

1. Start with an incredibly small habit.

Make it so easy you can't say no.
—Leo Babauta



When most people struggle to build new habits, they say something like, “I just need more motivation (<https://jamesclear.com/motivation>).” Or, “I wish I had as much willpower (<https://jamesclear.com/willpower>) as you do.”

This is the wrong approach. Research shows that willpower is like a muscle (<https://jamesclear.com/willpower-decision-fatigue>). It gets fatigued as you use it throughout the day. Another way to think of this is that your motivation ebbs and

flows. It rises and falls. Stanford professor BJ Fogg calls this the “motivation wave (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqUSjHjIEFg>).”

Solve this problem by picking a new habit that is easy enough that you don't need motivation to do it. Rather than starting with 50 pushups per day, start with 5 pushups per day. Rather than trying to meditate for 10 minutes per day, start by meditating for one minute per day. Make it easy enough that you can get it done without motivation.

Further reading: Identity-Based Habits: How to Actually Stick to Your Goals (<https://jamesclear.com/identity-based-habits>)

2. Increase your habit in very small ways.

Success is a few simple disciplines, practiced every day; while failure is simply a few errors in judgment, repeated every day.

—Jim Rohn

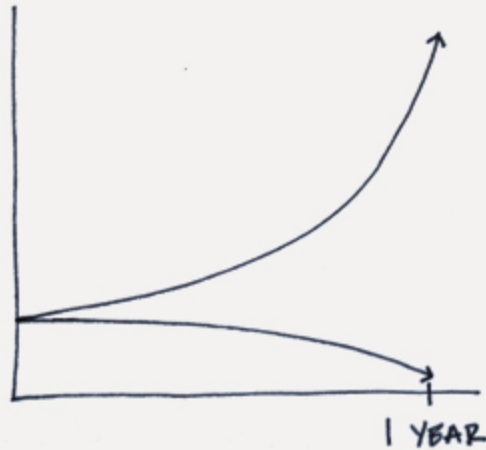
THE POWER OF TINY GAINS

1% BETTER EVERYDAY

$$1.01^{365} = 37.78$$

1% WORSE EVERYDAY

$$0.99^{365} = 0.03$$



JAMESCLEAR.COM

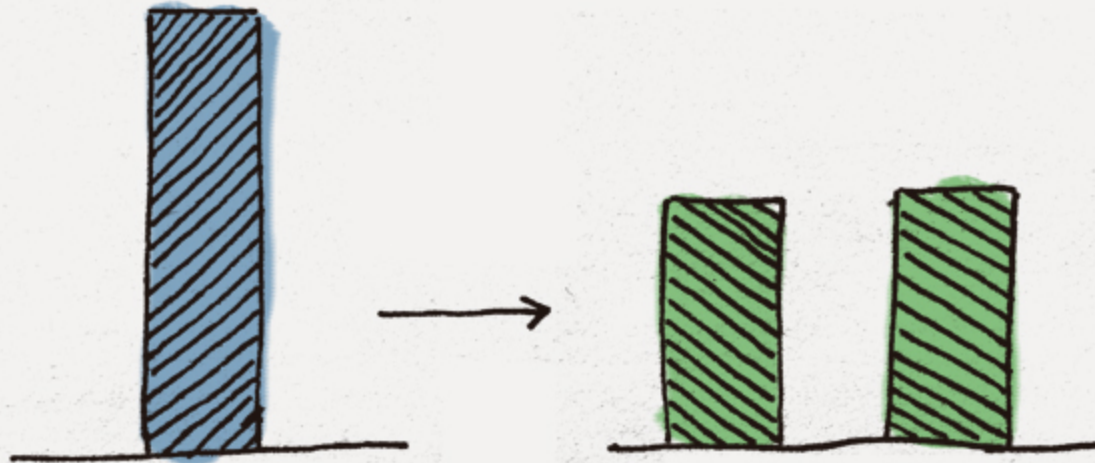
One percent improvements add up surprisingly fast. So do one percent declines.

Rather than trying to do something amazing from the beginning, start small and gradually improve. Along the way, your willpower and motivation will increase, which will make it easier to stick to your habit for good.

Further reading: This Coach Improved Every Tiny Thing by 1 Percent and Here's What Happened (<https://jamesclear.com/marginal-gains>)

3. As you build up, break habits into chunks.

BREAK BIG HABITS DOWN



JAMESCLEAR.COM

If you continue adding one percent each day, then you'll find yourself increasing very quickly within two or three months. It is important to keep each habit reasonable, so that you can maintain momentum (<https://jamesclear.com/physics-productivity>) and make the behavior as easy as possible to accomplish.

Building up to 20 minutes of meditation? Split it into two segments of 10 minutes at first.

Trying to do 50 pushups per day? Five sets of 10 might be much easier as you make your way there.

Further reading: I'm Using These 3 Simple Steps to Actually Stick with Good Habits (<https://jamesclear.com/small-habits>)

4. When you slip, get back on track quickly.

The best way to improve your self-control is to see how and why you lose control.
– Kelly McGonigal

"NEVER MISS TWICE"

NEVER MISS TWICE.

S	M	T	W	R	F	S
///	X	X	X	■	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X
X	■	X	■	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	■	///	///

JAMESCLEAR.COM

Top performers make mistakes, commit errors, and get off track just like everyone else. The difference is that they get back *on track* as quickly as possible.

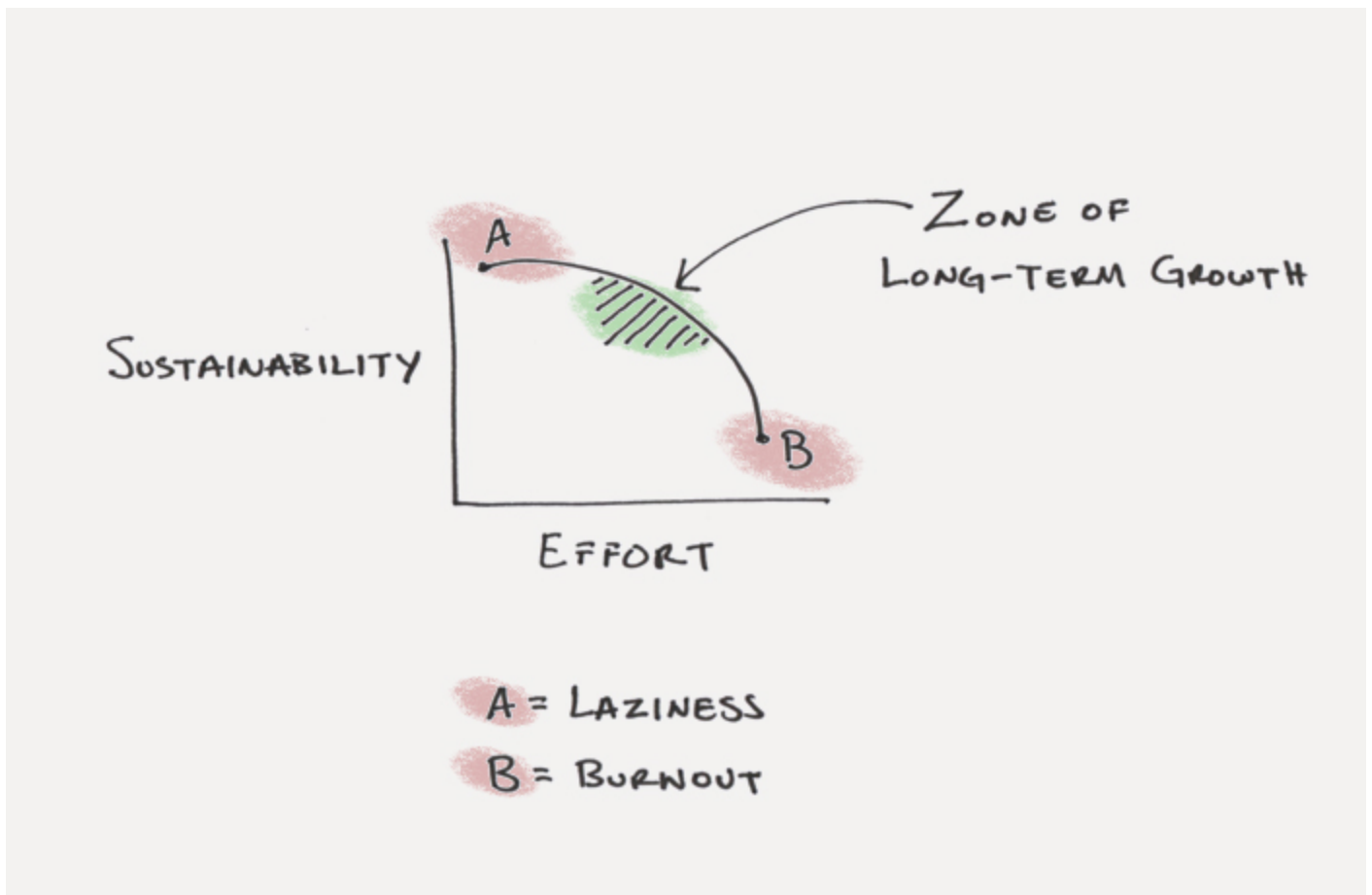
Research has shown that missing your habit once, no matter when it occurs, has no measurable impact on your long-term progress. Rather than trying to be perfect, abandon your all-or-nothing mentality.

You shouldn't expect to fail, but you should plan for failure (<https://jamesclear.com/plan-failure>). Take some time to consider what will prevent your habit from happening. What are some things that are likely to get in your way? What are some daily emergencies that are likely to pull you off course? How can you plan to work around these issues? Or, at least, how you can bounce back quickly from them and get back on track?

You just need to be consistent, not perfect. Focus on building the identity of someone who never misses a habit twice (<https://jamesclear.com/good-habits>).

Further reading: How to Stop Procrastinating by Using the “Seinfeld Strategy” (<https://jamesclear.com/stop-procrastinating-seinfeld-strategy>)

5. Be patient. Stick to a pace you can sustain.



Learning to be patient is perhaps the most critical skill of all. You can make incredible progress if you are consistent and patient.

If you are adding weight in the gym, you should probably go slower than you think. If you are adding daily sales calls to your business strategy, you should probably start with fewer than you expect to handle. Patience is everything. Do things you can sustain (<https://jamesclear.com/upper-bound>).

New habits should feel easy, especially in the beginning. If you stay consistent and continue increasing your habit it will get hard enough, fast enough. It always does.

If you want more practical ideas for how to build new habits (and break bad ones), check out my book *Atomic Habits* (<https://jamesclear.com/book/atomic-habits>), which will show you how small changes in habits can lead to remarkable results.

FOOTNOTES

1. Habits: A Repeat Performance

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20110526144503/http://dornsife.usc.edu/wendywood/research/documents/Neal.Wood.Quinn.2006.pdf>) by David T. Neal, Wendy Wood, and Jeffrey M. Quinn

2. Special thanks to BJ Fogg, Leo Babauta, and Kelly McGonigal for their research and work on habit formation and willpower. I have learned a lot from each of you.



Thanks for reading. You helped save a life.

Whenever you buy one of [my books \(https://jamesclear.com/books\)](https://jamesclear.com/books), join the [Habits Academy \(https://habitsacademy.com\)](https://habitsacademy.com), or otherwise contribute to my work, 5 percent of the profits are donated to the Against Malaria Foundation (AMF).

With each donation, AMF distributes nets to protect children, pregnant mothers, and families from mosquitos carrying malaria. It is one of the most cost-effective ways to extend life and fulfills my bigger mission to spread healthy habits and help others realize their full potential.

17077

MALARIA NETS DISTRIBUTED

30739

PEOPLE PROTECTED

317

YEARS OF ADDITIONAL LIFE

9

LIVES SAVED

BETTER HABITS

[Behavioral Psychology](https://jamesclear.com/behavioral-psychology) (<https://jamesclear.com/behavioral-psychology>).

[Habits](https://jamesclear.com/habits) (<https://jamesclear.com/habits>).

[Motivation](https://jamesclear.com/motivation) (<https://jamesclear.com/motivation>).

[Procrastination](https://jamesclear.com/procrastination) (<https://jamesclear.com/procrastination>).

BETTER PERFORMANCE

[Constant Improvement](https://jamesclear.com/continuous-improvement) (<https://jamesclear.com/continuous-improvement>).

[Deliberate Practice](https://jamesclear.com/deliberate-practice-theory) (<https://jamesclear.com/deliberate-practice-theory>).

[Goal Setting](https://jamesclear.com/goal-setting) (<https://jamesclear.com/goal-setting>).

[Productivity](https://jamesclear.com/productivity) (<https://jamesclear.com/productivity>).

JAMES CLEAR



(<https://www.linkedin.com/company/jamesclear/>)

BETTER THINKING

[Creativity](https://jamesclear.com/creativity) (<https://jamesclear.com/creativity>).

[Decision Making](https://jamesclear.com/decision-making) (<https://jamesclear.com/decision-making>).

[Focus](https://jamesclear.com/focus) (<https://jamesclear.com/focus>).

[Mental Toughness \(https://jamesclear.com/grit\)](https://jamesclear.com/grit)

OPTIMAL HEALTH

[Better Sleep \(https://jamesclear.com/sleep\)](https://jamesclear.com/sleep)

[Eating Healthy \(https://jamesclear.com/eat-healthy\)](https://jamesclear.com/eat-healthy)

[Strength Training \(https://jamesclear.com/strength-training\)](https://jamesclear.com/strength-training)

Powered by [LiquidWeb \(https://www.liquidweb.com/partner-community/get-started/?](https://www.liquidweb.com/partner-community/get-started/?)

[irgwc=1&clickid=RljW5XQW8xyJRi-](https://www.liquidweb.com/partner-community/get-started/?irgwc=1&clickid=RljW5XQW8xyJRi-)

[wUx0Mo382UkIXPh3BrRI%3AS80&iradid=619008&irpid=1906336&sharedid=&ir=1&utm_source=1906336&utm_medium=affiliate&utm_term=IR&utm_content=619008\)](https://www.liquidweb.com/partner-community/get-started/?irgwc=1&clickid=RljW5XQW8xyJRi-wUx0Mo382UkIXPh3BrRI%3AS80&iradid=619008&irpid=1906336&sharedid=&ir=1&utm_source=1906336&utm_medium=affiliate&utm_term=IR&utm_content=619008)