

Using evidence-based self-improvement strategies to incorporate

COVID-19 Infection Prevention In Everyday Life

Resource made by Shea O'Neil, 4-6-24

Summary

1. Why work with habits as a main source of intervention for establishing COVID-19 prevention strategies into our lives?

All behavior is driven by the desire to solve a problem: According to Behavioral Scientist Jason Hreha: “Habits are, simply, reliable solutions to **recurring problems** in our environment.”

COVID-19 exposure and subsequent repeat infections is a prime example of a recurring problem due to its impact on increasing health risks, including the development of chronic long-term health problems (those associated under the term long COVID). There are evidence-based strategies for establishing new habits and breaking old habits consciously that would benefit our ability to incorporate infection prevention into our daily lives.

Forming Habits Eases Cognitive Load and Frees Up Energy: “Habits are mental shortcuts learned from past experience. The primary reason the brain remembers the past is to better predict what will work in the future. As habits are created, the level of activity in the brain decreases. Habits reduce cognitive load and free up mental capacity, so you can allocate your attention to other tasks. Habits do not restrict freedom, they create it” (*Atomic Habits*, pgs 45-46).

Incorporating COVID-19 prevention strategies into our lives may take a small initial amount of work, but will ultimately result in less cognitive load and greater health that will exceed what our former habits offered, and make up for the cost of implementation.

2. Why should we take time to reassess our habits?

Habits can lock us into previous patterns of thinking and acting—even when the world is shifting around us. Life is constantly changing, so we need to periodically check in to see if our old habits and beliefs are still serving us.

Certain habits that we have established in the past as “good habits” may no longer be appropriate during times where COVID-19 is circulating and causing long-term health issues in people. Conversely, the habit may be able to remain but need to be modified to make it appropriate. To do this, we need to look at the underlying motives behind an old habit and find a new habit that will better serve us in the new environment. Psychologist Carl Jung said: “Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life, and you will call it fate.” The process of reassessing habits needs to be conscious, or old habits that no longer support us could run us into the ground.

Underlying motives Examples:	Old habit	New habit
Obtain food and water	going inside a grocery store	use curb-side pick-up or delivery
Connect and bond with others	Take an in-person unmasked yoga class or go out to eat weekly with friends	go on a masked hike with locals in a still-COVIDing group or take an online group art class
Achieve status and prestige	Attending an in-person celebration with a crowd of people, most who are not masking, to give us a award	Modify the event so it occurs as a virtual event or has an way to participate remotely to accept the award; Find a way to make the event safer by limiting time there, wearing high quality respirator mask, and doing in a space that has enhanced ventilation/filtration to the 8-12 ACH by adding air purifiers, upgrading air filters, and opening

		windows/doors, or doing outdoors in a spaced out way.
Find love and reproduce	Going out to a bar, club, party, or concert to find and meet single people.	Join a covid-cautious group (Facebook (search Still Coviding groups), covid meetups , Discord covid groups, and apps) ie Refresh) for those still coviding are available.

3. How do habits affect our beliefs and identity?

The most effective way to change your habits is to focus not on what you want to achieve, but on who you wish to become: In his New York Times Best Seller *Atomic Habits*, author James Clear writes, “You can choose the identity you want to reinforce today with the habits you choose today. They are the channel through which you develop your deepest beliefs about yourself”. The concept of identity-based habits involves a two-step process: (1) Identify the type of person you want to be (2) Prove it to yourself with small wins. In this way, your habits shape your identity, and your identity shapes your habits.

4. How Do We Create New Habits and Break Old Habits?

The Science of How Habits Work: All habits proceed through four stages in the same order: cue (ie your phone buzzes with a new text message), craving (ie you want to learn the contents of the message), response (ie. You grab the phone and read the text), and reward (ie you satisfy your craving to read the message.) The process is cyclical, with the Reward either reinforcing or not reinforcing the cue. (In the phone example, the Cue of the phone buzzing is reinforced, and consequently the Response (grabbing your phone) becomes associated with the cue (your phone buzzing). When making good habits, or breaking bad habits, one can adapt these stages into frameworks for behavioral change:

	How to Create A New Habit
The 1st law (Cue)	Make it Obvious

<p>Every habit is initiated by a cue— a bit of information that predicts a reward.</p>	<p>Habit Stacking: Give your habit or habit cue a home: Rearrange Environment, Go to New Environment, or tie it to a relationship in the old environment, such as:</p> <p>When [Situation X] arises, I will perform [response Y].</p> <p>I will [behavior] at [time] in [location].</p> <p>Before/During/After [current habit], I will [new habit].</p>
<p>The 2nd Law (Craving)</p> <p>Cues trigger a craving (thoughts, feelings, or emotions that are the motivational forces behind a habit).</p> <p>Habits are a dopamine-driven feedback loop. When dopamine rises, so does our motivation to act. It is the anticipation of the reward—not the fulfillment of it—that gets us to take action.</p> <p>The role of family and friends in shaping your habits</p> <p>The culture we live in determines which behaviors are attractive to us. We tend to adopt habits that are praised and</p>	<p>Make it Attractive</p> <p>Habits are attractive when we associate them with positive feelings and experiences.</p> <p>Temptation-Bundling: associate the things you need to do with things you already like.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After I [current habit] I will [habit I need], and 2. After [habit I need] I will [habit I want] <p>ie.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After I get back from my lunch break, I will call three potential clients (need) 2. After I call three potential clients, I will check my Facebook (want). <p>One of the most effective things you can do to build better habits is to join a culture where</p> <p>1- your desired behavior is the normal behavior,</p>

<p>approved of by our culture because we have a strong desire to fit in and belong to the tribe. We tend to imitate the habits of 3 social groups: the close (family and friends), the many (the tribe), and the powerful (those with status and prestige).</p>	<p>2-you already have something in common with the group.</p> <p>We might replace old habits with ones that better serve us:</p> <p>Instead of {old habit } to fulfill [core need], I will do [new habit that will serve that need]</p>
<p>The 3rd Law (Response)</p> <p>A response is the actual habit (thought or action) you perform (affected by motivation, friction, and ability), that will deliver the reward.</p> <p>Sometimes our motivation is to be lazy and do what is convenient. Energy is precious (law of least effort)</p>	<p>Make it Easy</p> <p>Focus on taking action (the behavior that will deliver an outcome) not just being in motion (preparing). The most effective form of learning is practice—not planning.</p> <p>The amount of time you have been performing a habit is not as important as the number of times. Habits become more automatic through repetition.</p> <p>Reduce points of friction. Make it easy to do the right thing. Prime the environment for future use.</p> <p>Habits are the entry point– they are the cab, not the gym (make a habit really easy, such as putting out a yoga mat, and not focused on an hour of yoga, which may inevitably follow but may just be a short yoga.. But all you have to commit to is putting out the mat).</p> <p>Make one time actions that lock in good habits (ie: set up your house to get 6-12 ACH by adding portable purifiers and/or air cleaners such as CR-Boxes; download a grocery curbside pickup app (such as a Walmart app) and create an online grocery account).</p> <p>Use technology to help automate habits</p>
<p>The 4th Law (Reward)</p>	<p>Make it Satisfying</p>

<p>The Reward is the end goal of every habit. They satisfy us, they teach us (loops back to the cue phase).</p> <p>The human brain evolved to prioritize immediate rewards over delayed rewards.</p>	<p>To get a habit to stick, you need to feel immediately successful, even if it's in a small way.</p> <p>By making it satisfying, you increase the odds that a behavior will be repeated next time.</p> <p>Incentives can start a habit, identities sustain a habit.</p> <p>Make sure to select short-term rewards that reinforce your identity, not conflict with it. Ie if your goal is to reduce body fat and increase muscle, but your reward for exercising is to eat a big bowl of ice cream, then you're casting votes for conflicting identities, and it ends up being a wash.</p> <p>Sometimes, creating satisfying visual measures, aka using a habit-tracker, helps by 1-creating a visual cue that reminds you to act, 2- is inherently motivating because you see the progress you are making and don't want to lose it, 3- feels satisfying whenever you record another successful instance of your habit, and 4- provides proof that you are casting votes for the type of person you wish to become. Don't do it if it feels tedious. You can automate it. It can be temporary.</p> <p>Recover quickly if/when your habits break down. Try not to miss it twice in a row. Putting up something is better than putting up nothing.</p>
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	How to Break An Old Habit
The 1st law (Cue)	Make it Invisible Reduce exposure to the cue that causes it

<p>Every habit is initiated by a cue— a bit of information that predicts a reward.</p>	<p>Spend less time in tempting situations</p> <p>Self-control is a short-term strategy, not a long-term one (it takes will-power, lots of conscious energy and attention), it is much better to optimize your environment</p>
<p>The 2nd Law (Craving)</p> <p>Cues trigger a craving (thoughts, feelings, or emotions that are the motivational forces behind a habit</p>	<p>Make it Unattractive</p>
<p>The 3rd Law (Response)</p> <p>A response is the actual habit (thought or action) you perform (affected by motivation, friction, and ability), that will deliver the reward.</p>	<p>Make it Difficult</p>
<p>The 4th Law (Reward)</p> <p>The Reward is the end goal of every habit. They satisfy us, they teach us (loops back to the cue phase).</p>	<p>Make it Unsatisfying</p> <p>Immediate reinforcement can be especially helpful when dealing with habits of avoidance, which are behaviors you want to stop doing (not doing something is not visible, and does not give satisfaction). Instead do something like, if you are trying to stop traveling as much and pass on a trip, open a savings account for something you want— maybe “Leather jacket”, and put the same amount of money into it. In this way you are making it satisfying to do nothing.</p>

Implementation: Ready, Willing, and Able

Learning Context: “You can choose the identity you want to reinforce today with the habits you choose today... they are the channel through which you develop your deepest beliefs about yourself” (Atomic Habits, pg 41)

Example:

I want to be the kind of person who cares about my health and the health of others, provides safe accessibility in my work and life, and creates a better future for future generations. To reinforce such an identity while COVID-19 infections are circulating and causing long-term health issues, I want to develop habits that reduce COVID-19 infections in my household and reduce transmission to others in the community. The precautions I want to incorporate into my life include:

- wearing an N-95 or equivalent respirator mask when around other households
- using enhanced air quality in spaces I control (my home, office, classroom)
- For non-essential activities, only go where others are willing to wear masks. Implement enhanced air quality to the 6-12+ ACH or similar standard for infection control if possible, or meet outdoors (while also masking).
- For essential activities, using virtual resources where available for essential activities that are not using the above precautions, or, if it must be in-person, advocate in advanced for as many [reasonable accommodations](#), as possible. For example:
 - Use the highest level of masking (at least N95, but also consider elastomeric Half Faced respirator P100, or a PAPR depending on circumstances).
 - Use highest personal air filtration that I can, including bringing a personal HEPA for directional airflow
 - Putting in an accommodation request for people working with me or close to me to wear a respirator mask, and bring some with me/call to remind for best effect
 - spend as little time there as possible if they are not using precautions adequately
 - Use things like nose spray and mouthwash afterwards
 - Be aware of symptoms for 14 days after
 - Have tests on hand, use if having symptoms, especially if I must be around others unmasked, ie household (try to identify infection with at least 2-3 tests spaced 48 hours apart).
 - Have treatments available or plans for getting them if positive OR symptomatic (ie Paxlovid, OTC meds)

- Have a plan to prevent spreading to others in my household

Large, One-Time Changes: Examples of big changes may include: establishing a homeschooling or virtual schooling routine as an alternative to public schools; changing colleges to one that offers virtual courses; or changing jobs to fit in with your value-based and health-based precautions (ie remote work); reassessing medical providers- making [accommodation requests for essential services](#), and changing providers to ones that are able to accommodate without compromising care or needed medications; creating a new circle of friends that shares the values of the new identity one is reinforcing, setting up boundaries with friends and family that are not using precautions in their normal lives, and participating in activities that are compatible to the new habits you are putting into your life.

Procedure: What New Habits Do I Need to Form and What Old Habits Do I Need to Break?

- Direct Instruction

Example: Bringing N95 Masks With Me When I Leave the House, and Wearing them when around other households

	How to Create A New Habit
The 1st law (Cue)	<p>Make it Obvious:</p> <p><i>Ex: N95 masks in mask bag on lanyard with small sanitizer attached as well, and place on hook by my purse, which I always bring with me when I leave the house.</i></p>
The 2nd Law (Craving)	<p>Make it Attractive</p> <p><i>Try out a variety of masks and find one that is the most comfortable without compromising fit or filtration, and that makes you feel the best when wearing it. Put stickers an pro-masking stuff around you.</i></p>
The 3rd Law (Response)	<p>Make it Easy</p> <p><i>Keeping it on a lanyard allows me to put it</i></p>

	<p><i>on easily when I leave the car or if I had an incident such as getting pulled over I can access quickly. I buy masks that are ear loops for quick low risk activities like curbside pickups; bring a clear mask for activities where I would need to be identified quickly. Carry and use best fit/filtration N95 masks that require over the head straps for if I go into a place like a hospital that is higher risk, or if I am attending a longer event. Bring a cooling fan for longer events that are in hot or humid settings.</i></p>
The 4th Law (Reward)	<p>Make it Satisfying</p> <p><i>Carry peppermints, I like and take one before donning mask, nice smell and taste. Say a quick thank you for the blessing of being able to have this great technology and being able to afford it and it being abundant. After I put sanitizer on, put my favorite hand lotion on if I have the time, and enjoy that I am improving my hands which have always been dry.</i></p>

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The 3rd Law (Response)	Make it Difficult

The 4th Law (Reward)	Make it Unsatisfying

b. Guided Practice

When [Situation X] arises, I will perform [response Y].

I will [behavior] at [time] in [location].

After I [current habit], I will [new habit].

Underlying motives	Old habit	New habit

c. Independent Practice

	How to Create A New Habit
The 1st law (Cue)	Make it Obvious:
The 2nd Law (Craving)	Make it Attractive
The 3rd Law (Response)	Make it Easy
The 4th Law (Reward)	Make it Satisfying



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d. Check for Understanding

How does creating a desired identity motivate habits?:

When and how should we reassess our habits consciously?

What are the 4 laws for habit formation?

e. Closing

What Next?: What can I do to start the process of building habits in my life?

(ie Download and Print off practice sheets, set a reminder on phone to think about this more and/or discuss it with others, set up a date and time to do more research)

Materials & Resources

Instructional Materials:

Book (nonfiction): [Atomic Habits](#) by James Clear

- a. Resources: <https://jamesclear.com/atomic-habits/cheatsheet>

Differentiated Instruction

Goal: Develop Tools for Each Type of Learner

- a. [Apply Habits to parenting](#)
- b. [Apply Habits to business](#)

Outside Resources

Supplementary Resources:

Website: [The Maskers Comic](#)

- [Psychosocial Resources](#)
- [Clear Public Health Messaging](#)

Website: [World Health Network](#)

- [Guideline for Individuals and Institutions](#)
- [Paths to Healthy Learning:](#)

Support

Goal: Where can a person reach out for support?

COVID-19 Daily Call Meetings at the World Health Network ([register here](#))

Social Media: search for Still COVIDing groups on Facebook, ZeroCOVID Communities on Reddit, [COVID Isn't Over Community Events](#), Still COVIDing Discord groups

Connect with others in your area by searching covidmeetups.com and/or finding local still COVIDing groups on Facebook.

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For questions or concerns email me at themaskerscomic@yahoo.com

