



red dandelion
COACHING

SEVEN DAILY DELICIOUS HABITS

Do you have any habits you wish you could ditch? Or habits you wish you could foster? How come it's so hard to do what you know you want to do?

We have all been through the loop (some of us more than others!) starting to do something that we know is good-for-us, but then failing. Today's Tip looks at some of the reasons why this happens, and also provides you with a way to keep going, enabling you to get a new habit established in your daily life.

Ingrained habits

Our brain contains billions of tiny cells called neurons that transmit information via electrical impulses between themselves to different areas of the brain. From birth we have as many neurons as we will ever need, but many of neurons are not connected to each other. As we learn new things, do things repeatedly, strong connections are formed between certain neurons, creating neural pathways. These pathways are like a super highways through the brain: memories, responses and behaviours can be accessed at the speed of light. When you learn something, a new pathway is formed, but this is where we can become unstuck with habits. Habits are by their nature, things we do repeatedly. The neural pathways for your current habits are very well established.

Let me give you an analogy. Think of the neural pathways as motorways. They are the most direct routes, well sign-posted and you can travel along them safely and at high speeds. When you learn something new, or if you are trying to break an old habit, you are creating a new neural pathway. Your brain makes new connections between neurons in response to the learning and new behaviour, but this pathway is like a cart track: it's very narrow with unexpected bends and very few signposts. When you first go down this cart track, you have to focus and often take it slow.

When you have the choice between using the familiar, fast motorway or the little known cart track, it's not surprising to find that we frequently revert to our old ways – using the well-known motorway! However, if you keep repeating the new behaviour or applying the new learning, then the brain will begin to upgrade the 'cart-track'. Over time it will become an A-road, then a dual carriageway and, in time, a new motorway. At the same time this is going on, the old motorway begins to degrade itself.

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Creating new habits

Aristotle wrote: *"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act but a habit."* Flipping the coin on this quote shows us that if we want to shine, do something really well, then we need to do it repeatedly – just like the old saying of *"practice makes perfect."* We all know this. If you decide to get fit, stop smoking, start eating and drinking more healthily or doing any number of other things that you want to do in your life, can you choose to be gentle with yourself? Can you be loving instead of beating yourself up when you catch yourself driving down your 'old motorway'? I would love for you to be gentle as it actually increases your chances of success.

Being gentle vs beating yourself up

Supposing you decide to give up caffeine. During the first few days of your new habit, you will be focused. As well as the withdrawal symptoms, as your body readjusts, you are trying to concentrate on new behaviour too. For example, what do you drink when your workmates put the kettle on? How do you deal with the temptation of the aroma of freshly ground coffee? In a moment of distraction, when your spouse or work colleague hands you a coffee without asking (because it's their habit) and you have taken a sip without realizing what you're doing, are you going to think you've failed?

If you choose to be gentle with yourself, you will forgive this lapse and try again. This time you will be more determined to make it happen. If you chose to beat yourself up, telling yourself you have no will-power, that you are just no good at making changes, then trying again will feel desperately hard. No one is motivated to do things that feel heavy or like hard work.

New habits need reminders

Because we really are creatures of habit, creating a new habit means you need to pay attention to your intention. For some things, setting reminders in your calendar or diary is a good way to keep you focused on your intent. If you are creative, perhaps set up a screen-saver message, or post reminders on your fridge, or beside the bathroom mirror, or even create a mood-board with pictures of anything that inspires you.

Seven Daily Delicious Habits

Sometimes the smallest of changes can have the biggest impact on your life. One of my coaching tools is the Seven Daily Delicious Habits. Why 'delicious'? Because when you complete your new habits that's how you feel! Still skeptical? All I can ask is for you check-in with yourself on how you feel when you get a perfect 7 (see below). If it's not 'delicious' – get back to me! Seven Daily Delicious Habits is simple chart allows you to plot your progress. It's a visual reminder too, and it helps you keep on track with your intentions.

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If you would like to receive Seven Daily Delicious Habits, email me, and I will send it to you as a pdf file. Alternatively, you can easily create your own. Begin by choosing 7 small things that you would either like to add or take away from your life. Choose ONLY things that you genuinely want to become a new habit ñ not things you feel you 'should' be doing. Choose things that will make YOU feel good ñ things that will give you energy. Then write these things into your chart. Now day-by-day monitor yourself.

Remember be gentle with yourself on the days you only score one or two. This is already one or two things more than you would have achieved before. And celebrate the days you score a perfect 7!

7 Daily Delicious Habits



ACTIVELY CHOOSING TO CHANGE THINGS FOR THE BETTER – DAY-BY-DAY

MONTH... July 08.....

	Drink 1½ litres of water	Smile at a stranger	Call someone I love	Exercise for at least 30 minutes	No caffeine	Make my bed	5 fruit and veg	Total
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
2	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
3	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	5
4	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	2
5	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
6								
7								
8								
9								
26								
27								
28								
29								
30								
31								
Totals								



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A few ideas...

Drink more water	Do an act of random kindness	No caffeine
Read for 30 minutes	Switch TV off at a certain time	Exercise
Eat at a leisurely pace	Prepare clothes for next day	Floss teeth
Look after nails	Pay a compliment	5 fruit and vegetables
Answer emails	Deal with all paperwork	Keep to a money budget

...and finally

I hope you have found this tip useful. As always. I love to receive your feedback so do let me know how you get on with changing your habits. And, if you're truly stuck, why not book a trial coaching session with me? I will help you get unstuck and back on track. Call me on **01305 772220** or 0845 83 86 733 or email me, jennie@reddandelion.co.uk.

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