

How to Heal a Little Each Day



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Why Habits Hold the Key to Healing

For better or worse, the human nervous system is designed to reinforce and repeat familiar habits. This includes habits you consciously adopt, like brushing your teeth. It also includes habits you don't consciously adopt, such as your breathing rhythms, thought patterns, or which physical sensations show up in the body when you're experiencing stress.

Your nervous system is an excellent incubator for habit formation.

The more frequently it “practices” activating a given neural pathway, the easier it becomes to activate the pathway again in the future.

This is thanks, in part, to the help of myelin sheath: an insulating layer that forms around nerve cells, allowing electrons to transmit more quickly and efficiently.

The upside of this incredibly smart and efficient nervous system is that it is highly plastic. Its habits can be changed throughout your life. The downside, however, is that the nervous system can adopt habits without your conscious consent. This includes habits that make pain worse.

Many people mistakenly believe that healing is reached at a single point of breakthrough - an “aha” moment that changes everything. Most commonly, though, healing is achieved through small, consistent adjustments to the nervous system’s habits.

You are not consciously responsible for the state of your nervous system’s habits today. You do, however, hold the power to change them.

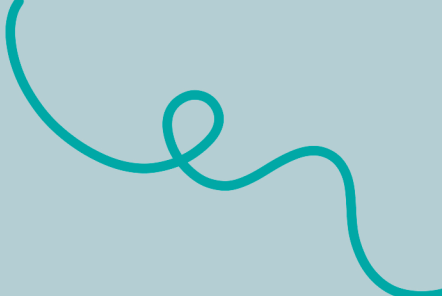
This workbook is designed to help you unlock your nervous system’s natural habit-forming power so that you can heal with consistency and ease.





How to Get Rid of What's Not Working

A **barrier habit**, put simply, is any habit that is impeding your healing progress. The easiest way to identify a barrier habit is to look for patterns and routines that amplify your fear of symptoms and/or focus on symptoms beyond a reasonable level. These habits activate your brain's danger system and keep your nervous system on a higher, more sensitive alert setting than necessary.



Common Examples of Barrier Habits

Tick off any of the common barrier habits that apply to you or use these examples to inspire your own list on the next page.

☐ Automatically diving into fearful thought spirals and intense Google searching after the onset of a symptom

☐ Frequently redirecting the topic of conversation to my symptoms and their negative impact on me

☐ Going into “freeze” mode and stopping all movement or activity when I fear symptoms may come on

☐ Going far out of my way to avoid anything I fear may worsen my symptoms

☐ Focusing intensely on my symptoms and how I might be able to fix them whenever they are present

☐ Constantly worrying about the potential for a flare-up, even when symptoms are not present

☐ Unconsciously reinforcing the narrative that my body is broken, unfixable, or worse than other people's



Identify Your Barrier Habits

List out any other habits you can think of that result in amplified fear or focus on pain. Circle the habit that seems to be holding you back the most.

The barrier habit I would like to break is...

Habits become ingrained in the nervous system because they are associated with some type of reward. This is true for helpful habits and unhelpful habits alike.

Example: Talking about your pain all the time is not a helpful habit. It may, however, be providing rewards, like social connection and validation.

Consider the barrier habit you listed above. **What rewards might this habit be providing for you?**

One successful way to break a “barrier habit” is to replace it with another habit that can provide the same reward.

Example: Instead of talking about pain as a shortcut to social connection, you might try talking about a shared hobby or interest.

What alternate habits can you think of that could provide a similar reward as your barrier habit?



How to Form More Helpful Habits

One of the best ways to ensure progress in your healing is to consciously design habits that are in the long-term interest of your nervous system. These healing habits should have the opposite effect of a barrier habit: they should reduce fear of symptoms and/or reduce focus on symptoms. Healing habits will look different for everyone, but if you need ideas, the next page contains a list of “supercharged habits” that we recommend for anyone hoping to heal.

Five Supercharged Healing Habits

1

Regular Meditation

Meditation can relax the nervous system and mind at the same time, giving a one-two punch to fear of pain and focus on pain.

2

Movement & Exercise

Gentle movement goes a long way in easing fear of pain (and provides a mood boost to boot!).

3

The Curable App

It's easy, it's guided, and it's specifically designed to reduce fear of pain and focus on symptoms. What more could you need?

4

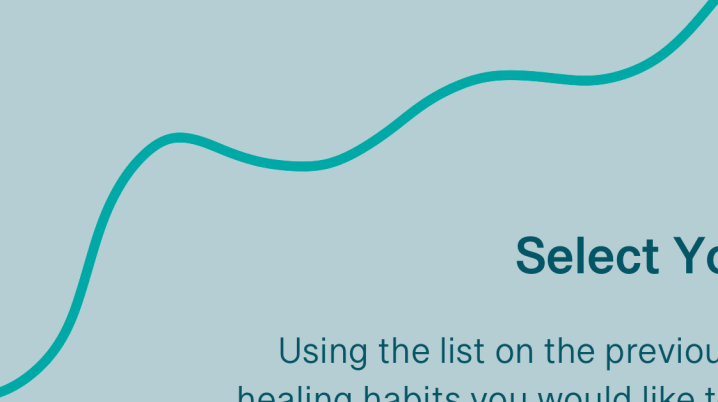
Gratitude

It sounds cheesy, but it works. For an extra boost of healing, try being grateful for what's going right in your body each day.

5

Playtime

Trouble focusing on anything but pain? Set aside time that has no purpose other than your own enjoyment and see what happens.

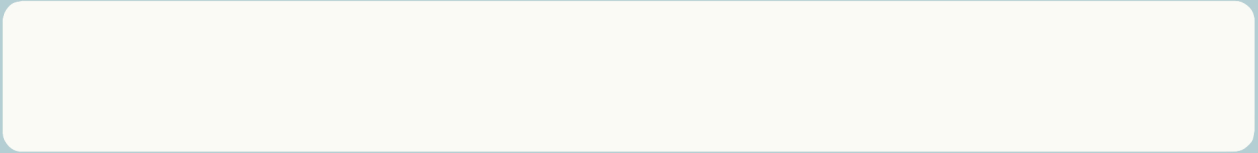


Select Your Healing Habits

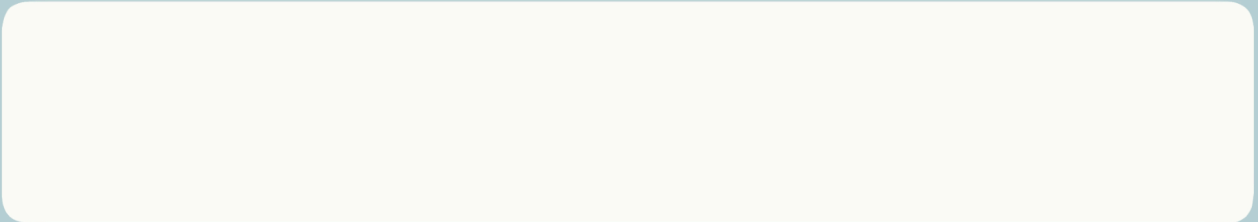
Using the list on the previous page as inspiration, make a list of **new** healing habits you would like to adopt and/or **existing** healing habits that you would like to amplify.



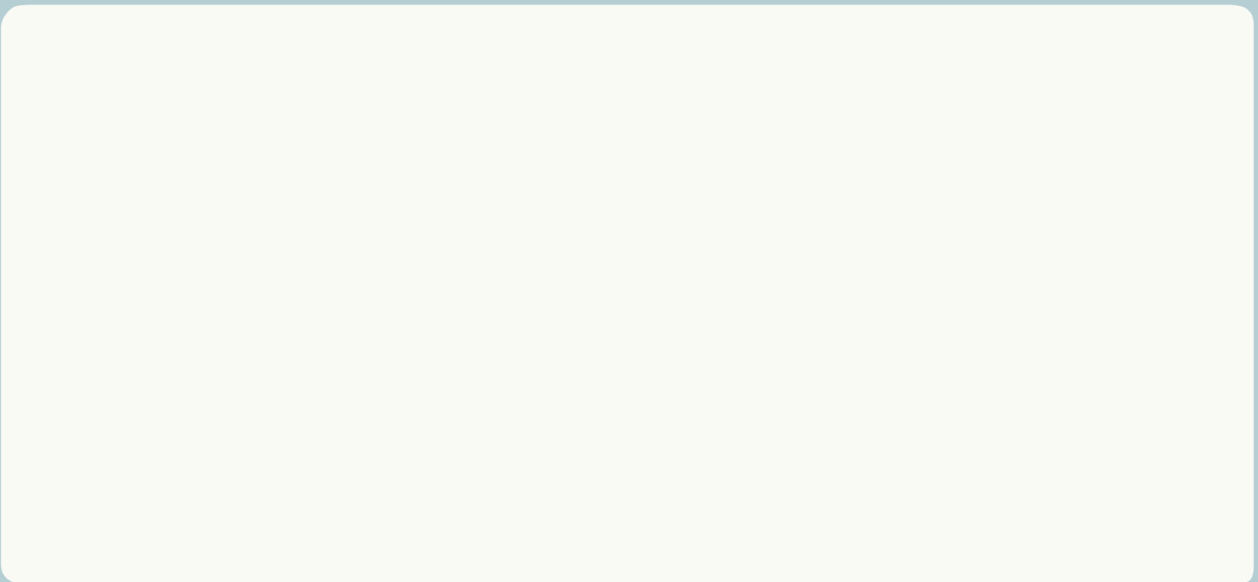
The healing habit I would most like to adopt or amplify is...



The reason why this habit feels important to me is...



My plan for incorporating this habit into my daily life is...





References & Recommendations

Want more information about the neuroscience of habits?
Here are the books we recommend:

Clear, James. Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones. Avery, 2018.

Duhigg, Charles. The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business. Random House, 2012.

Korb, Alex. The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression, One Small Change at a Time. New Harbinger Publications, 2015.