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5 'Keystone Habits' To Take Your Life To The Next Level



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Keystone habits, a term coined by Charles Duhigg (*author of The Power of Habit*), are habits that automatically lead to multiple positive behaviors and positive effects in your life.

According to Charles Duhigg, these habits spark “*chain reactions that help other good habits take hold.*” In other words, building a keystone habit is like knocking down the biggest domino — it will automatically knock down the other dominoes as well.

That’s why you don’t have to change dozens of habits to get to your goals. Instead, you only have to change a few keystone habits that will have a ripple effect on your life.

Essentially, when you focus on building keystone habits, you hit two birds (*or even more*) with one stone. Therefore, focusing on these habits is a highly productive use of your time.

Keystone Habit 1: Exercise

According to [research](#), regular exercise (*at least 3 times per week*) is a keystone habit that

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alcohol, smoke less, and be more productive at work. Furthermore, it contributes to a better mood and better sleep quality.

All in all, by focusing on just this one habit, you automatically experience positive effects in other areas of your life.



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I notice my weeks are much more productive when I'm getting my regular exercise. I tend to have more energy, sleep better, have stronger willpower, and make better decisions.

These positive effects cause a ripple effect in multiple areas of my life — including my work, relationships, self-image, and finances.

On the other hand, whenever I fall off-track with my exercise routine, I tend to also slack more with my work, nutrition, and finances as I have less energy, and lower willpower (*which leads to procrastination, eating junk food and making impulsive purchases*).

By following a consistent exercise routine, you automatically upgrade other areas of your life, making exercise a powerful keystone habit.

Keystone Habit 2: Meditation

A number of [studies](#) have linked regular meditation to differences in cortical thickness or density of gray matter in the brain. **In other words, your brain physically changes because of meditation** (*a process called 'neuroplasticity'*).

One of the most well-known studies to demonstrate this is a study led by Sara Lazar from Harvard University. This study demonstrated that regular meditation practice is correlated with increased grey matter (*aka, making it easier for neurons to fire*) in the following areas of the brain:

- **Pre-frontal cortex** — The area of the brain responsible for self-discipline, willpower, emotions, behavior, judgment, focus and our overall ability to make choices
- **Left Hippocampus** — The area of the brain that assists learning & memory and regulates emotions

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Furthermore, meditation correlates with a decrease in grey matter in the **amygdala** (*which regulates the 'fight or flight' instinct*), which means that people experience less stress and anxiety.

In short, **meditation helps your brain perform better**, which is why it's a powerful keystone habit.

Through daily meditation, you'll experience multiple different benefits such as better decision-making, better ability to focus, stronger willpower, better memory, more compassion, and less stress & anxiety.



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I experience my days to be much better when I've been meditating consistently. I experience less stress and anxiety (*which directly improves my performance and quality of life*), make better choices, and have better focus — directly improving my productivity.

To help get the most out of my meditation practice, I follow guided meditations and use a tool called Muse (*which looks like it comes straight from the future*).

Keystone Habit 3: Planning Your Day

Planning your day is another keystone habit that enables other positive habits, simply because you block time for it. When you schedule an activity — *whether your workout, reading session, meditation, or work* — **you're much more likely to actually do it**.

By pre-determining *when* you're going to do *what*, you remove the need for decision-making within the moment as you've already created a precise plan in advance. Psychologists call this an 'implementation intention'.



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A [study in the British Journal of Health Psychology](#) showed that creating such an implementation intention **increases the success rate of following through with an activity from 34% to 91%**.

In other words, by scheduling your day, you're much less likely to procrastinate. That's a big benefit for such a simple routine.

I clearly notice how my least productive days are the days that I didn't make a plan for. I tend to wander around, make low-quality choices, and procrastinate much more.

On the contrary, I get a lot more done on the days that I scheduled.

By planning your day, you enable other habits to flourish for which you 'wouldn't have time' otherwise. Simply by making an appointment with yourself and blocking time for an activity, you're much more likely to actually do it. That's exactly why planning your day is a vital keystone habit.

Keystone Habit 4: Sleep

Sleep is another keystone habit that leads to an incredible range of positive effects and triggers many other positive behaviors.

[Research](#) has shown that those who consistently get high-quality deep sleep tend to be more focused and productive during the day. Furthermore, they tend to eat less junk food and have an overall improved better mood.

All in all, a night of good sleep is at the foundation of a productive day, better health, better relationships, and overall improved quality of life.

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When I don't get enough high-quality sleep, I clearly notice that my thinking is more cluttered, and my ability to focus decreases heavily. Furthermore, my willpower tends to be much weaker, so I procrastinate more, and I don't always follow through with exercise, reading, or meditation.

On the contrary, when I get sufficient sleep, I tend to be more disciplined, motivated, and productive. Therefore, getting a good night sleep is a critical keystone habit. It leads to multiple productive behaviors that cause multiple positive effects in your life.

Keystone Habit 5: Follow A Morning Routine

Following a morning routine is another keystone habit from which multiple positive benefits and new behaviors flow. The power of a morning routine is that **you start your day proactively instead of reactively**. Instead of serving other people's agenda, you protect time for your own priorities.

By carving out time in the morning for your goals and self-improvement, you start your day productively. You tend to carry this focused and productive flow throughout the rest of the day, setting yourself up for a day of peak performance.



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A morning routine puts you in 'state' for the rest of the day. By doing things like journaling, meditating, eating a healthy breakfast, exercising, setting goals & priorities, and visualizing, you put your mind and body in a **peak performance state**.

From this empowering state, it's much easier to work hard, stop procrastinating, and pursue your goals with discipline.

Remember, you can never change just one behavior. **Our behaviors are interconnected, so when you change one behavior, other behaviors also shift.**

This is why a morning routine is so effective. You change one behavior at the start of your day, positively influencing your actions and behavior for the rest of the day.

Now Do It

Use the power of keystone habits to your advantage. Pick at least one of these keystone habits and implement it. Notice how it improves multiple aspects of your life, and how it causes a chain reaction of positive behaviors.

Be warned, however, because there are negative keystone habits as well. Habits like smoking, procrastinating, negative thinking, snoozing, and even excessive phone use lead to a range of negative effects and multiple negative habits — keeping you stuck in a cycle of low-performance.

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