



Lesson 6: How to Create and Change Your Habits

Hi, everybody. Welcome to day six of the Healthy Mindset Masterclass. We are almost halfway through our video lessons for this masterclass. Hopefully you've been able to attend the live question and answer sessions. If not, those are recorded and available for you to watch. Remember, if you have questions for the question-and-answer sessions, please email them to Masterclass@TheFastingMethod.com.

Today's topic is how to create and change your habits. Much of what we're all working on here is about reaching our goals. You often hear in our community and many other places, that what's really important to identify as far as your goals is what is your, why? Why are you doing this? Why are you taking on something like intermittent fasting, or even extended fasting? It's not something that everyone's doing. Why are you choosing to do it? What is the goal? What is the outcome that you're working toward?

We talk about that in means of our why, because it's our, what is our motivation? What is it that we're seeking from this? So if your, why, is to have an HbA1c that is 5.2 or below, but right now you're sitting at 6.9 or 7.4, that is so motivating to see where you're going. It helps us know what habits do I need to create to get to this result that I'm seeking. So knowing your why is one of the most important things in figuring out what habits should I be working on? Thinking about if I'm successful at doing what I'm striving to do here, what will it look like? How will my life be? What will my blood test look like? What will my weight be, or how will I feel in my clothes? What will my mindset be? How will I feel? How mobile will I be? How achy and painful will my body feel or not?

So these are things that usually come up when people think about their why. I will tell you that I see the least positive progress when people only focus on a weight number. If their goal is to lose weight and they solely focus on 10 pounds, 40 pounds, and 125 pounds, when that is their sole focus, it makes this process much more difficult for many, it's a really complicated goal. And for some, what happens is once they reach that goal, or get close to that goal, they have a hard time continuing, because their mind is convinced it's that number we're going for, and once we get to that number, we don't have to keep doing this. My hope for all of us here is that the things that we're working

on to optimize our health and improve our body weight, our lean mass versus our body fat, that, that's a lifelong process, and that it's lifelong sustainable. That's not as true if we narrowly choose a why that doesn't keep us going.

Throughout the program, throughout this two week period and beyond, I would encourage you to check in once in a while, what is my why now? Because what you start with as your, why, most likely will evolve and change over time. So once you really are clear of your, why, how do you want to feel? What do you want to be able to do? What do you want your body fat percentage to look like? How do you want your blood sugar numbers to be? Then you can start working on what habits will get you there, because it's not like you're going to do an old fashioned diet where you just work so hard and eat rabbit food, and then stop, because we all know what happens then. Let's talk about our habits and how we can help create some better habits.

The first thing I want to remind us is that our brain prefers routine. It likes what it already knows. It seeks what is familiar. The challenge with this is that most of what is familiar to us about what foods we eat and how frequently we eat, have gotten us into a difficult place with our health, or our body weight. So the fact that our brain wants to stay with what is familiar means that we're going to have to work against it a little bit to change those old habits and to make new habits. The good news about this piece of information is that we can create new habits that then become familiar and our brain will latch onto those and keep doing them. So it's going to take a period of time before that happens, but it is definitely possible. What tends to really create habit, one, is the repetition of completing a task, an action, or a thought. And I want to be really clear here. Habits are not only behaviors, we have habits of thought, we even have habits of feelings.

So, sometimes you might get caught up in something and realize, I think this same thing a lot. When this event happens, these are the thoughts I have. And those thoughts steer me down a bad path. So being really clear that we also have habits of thinking. And so part of your work here is to see if there are habits of thought that you can change. If you remember back to the first couple of lessons, I talked about paradigm shifting. What thoughts do you have that you continue to think? Mindset, what thoughts? What are you telling yourself? What is your self-talk? How are you describing how difficult it is to fast? And things like that. These are thought habits, and we can change them. Now, again, because we create habits by repeating behavior, or thoughts, and we extinguish them by not repeating them, it's really important to have a sense of building a habit, or extinguishing a habit, creating or breaking down.

Now, you're going to hear a lot of different things about how long it takes. Some people say that it takes 21 days to create a new habit, that if you do something for 21 days, it will be a habit. Some people think that this is too short of a time. It doesn't really give our brain time to fully latch on. Some people go with 30 days, I find that a number of the

people that I follow and really respect, they say somewhere between 66 to 90 days. I tend to be a little more toward the 90 days, but I think habits can become pretty well set at 66. They still may need some repetition, some intentional repetition even then. So if you think about it, as you are fasting, or changing eating habits, changing meal times, how frequently you eat, 66 to 90 days of a pattern before it starts to become a habit. So please don't expect yourself to have new habits by tomorrow, or new habits in three weeks. It's really not enough time to get them ingrained enough into your mind that they become habitual things.

Three keys to creating effective habit change. The first one is to choose habits that are congruent with your goals and your identity. The example I always use with this is for people who eat in a vegan approach to eating. It is very clear to them that they're not going to eat animal protein anymore, a very clear identity around what being a vegan means. When they have a rough day, or when it's Saturday night, I never hear someone who has chosen to eat vegan approach, say, I don't eat meat, but it's Saturday night, I'm going to have this steak. They don't do that, because their identity is wrapped up in that behavior. Creating habits that support the identity that is already congruent with you, or with the identity of where you are headed.

So let's say for example, you want to live the identity of someone who weighs under 200 pounds. You have to be setting goals and creating habits that are congruent with who you will be under 200 pounds. If you choose goals and habits that aren't congruent with this identity, it's much harder to make them stick. I was someone who ate ketogenically for several years and then loosened it up a little bit into a low carb category. When a friend asks me if I want to go out to eat, I don't have to decide, will I eat low carb today, or will I not? It's my identity that that is how I eat. So wherever we go, I know how I will look at the menu. I will look for the options on that menu that fit my identity, it's that much of a habit. I don't even look at certain things on the menu. I don't bother looking at the page that lists pasta dishes, it's incongruent with my identity.

So choose habits that are congruent with the identity, either that you already have and want to keep, or the identity that you're working toward developing. In this Masterclass, I am sharing a book list with you. And two of my favorite books on that list are about habits, *Tiny Habits* by BJ Fogg, and the other is called *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. Both of them talk about this idea of connecting our habits to other routine activities that we already naturally do. So for example, BJ Fogg in *Tiny Habits* talks about, he wanted to develop a pushup habit. He wanted to build up his upper body strength or something, so he wanted to do push ups, but he wasn't able to do many pushups in the beginning. So what he did is, every time he would go to the bathroom, on his way out, after he washed his hands, he would do some pushups against the wall. And he would start with just a couple. But notice, when I go to the bathroom, after I wash my hands, I do wall pushups.

So he's connecting the new behavior, the new habit that he's building, with something that he naturally already does. So this is a key part of developing habits. When you can, connect them with something that you already do. After I take my shower, I brush my teeth and then I don't eat anything because my teeth are freshly brushed. The next thing that both authors talk about as key to making habits stick is reinforcing them. And what many of us are used to is reinforcing habits with rewards, and this isn't exactly what I would focus on, but it's a much smaller reward than let's say, every time I do this, I get five gold stars or something like that.

So every time I do this habit, this small step of moving toward this goal, I'm going to celebrate it in a smaller way. So I'm going to say, nice job. You did it. Hey, that's five times today that you've done that. I'm going to get excited, I'm going to make a little cheer. Maybe I'm in public and I don't do it out loud, but I smile inside and think, nice job, you did it again. You did the right thing. It's reinforcing that I've taken the step. What a lot of us do when we're working on reaching a goal and changing a habit, is we are more used to celebrating once we get to the goal.

So let's say, for example, you want to lose 20 pounds. So when you're at 14 pounds, no celebrations, it's like, oh, not there yet, not there yet. And you wait until you get to 20 pounds, and then you go out and you get a hot fudge sundae. This is not good goal setting, and it's not a good way to reinforce habits. Instead, every step I take to those habits that I'm building of eating well, of completing my fasting goals, taking good care of myself, getting some movement or exercise, I celebrate those, I reinforce the small step, or the effort. Someone in our community recently shared that she likes to do quilting. And so what she does when she sets up her goal for the week, as far as how much fasting she's going to do, and how she's going to eat, every step, so each day when she eats the planned meal, or eats the way she has decided she will eat, she gets some credit. And every time she does the amount of fasting that she's decided she'll do, she gets some credit.

And then with that credit, she goes and buys some supplies for her craft. She's using a reward system, she's reinforcing herself for the effort, not waiting until she's done with her weight loss or her health goal. She's reinforcing the steps along the way, but she's not using food or beverage as that reward. This is a great system. Think about if there's a system that you can implement to reinforce the small steps, congratulating yourself, pat on the back.

The last step of creating habits and also extinguishing problematic habits, is for the new habits that you're working to build. I would encourage you to think about what barriers are in place that make this more difficult for me? So for example, if I want to get in the

habit of using magnesium while I'm fasting, and even on eating days, how can I make that easier for myself? And I use this example because I have magnesium sitting right here. I want to make this so easy that there's no reason for me not to do it every day.

My water bottle is right here. My magnesium is right here. Magnesium happens. That habit is so much easier because it's very accessible. So thinking about how can you make your new habit easier to complete? What resources do you need? How do you need your day set up, or your home set up, your kitchen, or whatever it is. The same is true on the flip side, if there are habits I want to eliminate, habits that are getting in my way of reaching my goal, I want to make them more difficult to complete. I want barriers in place that keep me from completing it. If you think about, let's say you want to watch less TV, hide the remote control.

If I actually have to get up, walk over to the TV and find the on switch, because nothing's easy on TVs anymore, I have to reach around the back, I'm going to watch a lot less TV because doing it is not as simple to do. So, how can you create barriers for a habit that you want to eliminate? And how can you remove barriers for a habit that you want to create? If I want to drink more water, I want to make my water more accessible. I don't want my water to be in a jug and a way back in the refrigerator that I have to dig through things each time. That's actually going to make me want to get water less often. How can I make it easier? How can I make it more accessible? Now, if there's a food that I know I'm working to eat less often, that would be the good thing to put a way back of the refrigerator, or a top shelf in a cupboard that I actually have to get a step stool out. That takes more work.

I'd like you to think about one or two specific habits that you believe will help you to reach your goal? And in doing so, I encourage you to think of what it would take to fulfill that habit. So for example, saying that my new habit is eating healthier. That is a very broad definition. And how will I know if I'm doing it? And how will I know if I'm doing enough of it? So if I say, I want to eat two servings of vegetables on an eating day, it's very easy to know if I've completed that. So I can reinforce that. But if I just say, I'm going to eat healthier, how do I know when to reinforce that? And how do I know if I'm really doing it? So make the habits you're creating as specific as possible so that you know what the criteria is. So, you know if you're completing it, or if you need to do some different efforts.

Let's say, for example, one of your goals is to reduce the amount of sugar, maybe you're not someone who's ready to completely give up sugar yet, but maybe you're someone who has decided you're going to limit your sugar use. What does that mean? If you normally eat 16 teaspoons of sugar, now you're going to eat 15? Because that's less, but it's probably not really significant enough to achieve your goals. So what would it

mean? I don't have more than one food a week that contains sugar, two meals, two foods, make it as specific as you can.

Next step I would invite you to do is to identify what resources or support you need to be sure to implement the behavior, or thoughts in creating the new habit. So for example, if I want to create some new habits of thinking, I might create a list of statements, put it on my phone so that several times throughout the day, maybe every time I grab my phone, I can click on that and read my list of positive statements. Do you need any supplies? Do you need to have things set up in a particular way?

Next thing I would invite you to do is to identify how you will reinforce the habit, the steps, the progress, the effort. Some of you might even decide to set up a system if you're working on eliminating some habits, that you set up a system of negative consequences when you continue to do that habit. So the next time I eat this thing that I'm no longer eating, I have to write a check to support a group that I don't really support, or I have to do something that would be more aversive to me. Maybe that's a reinforcer you need, I want to avoid that negative, so I'm going to stop doing that habit. What way of reinforcing the steps or effort, how are you going to reinforce that?

And then lastly, identify what barriers, if any, that you need to remove, or create. If it's a habit that I'm wanting to eliminate, how do I make it more difficult to complete that action? Let's say, for example, one of the habits you have is that while you're working on your fast, you get out an app and you order food, a very easy barrier, remove those apps from your phone, make it harder to get to. Even slowing down that process for a lot of us can change the behavior. If I have to download the app again, or if I have to call the restaurant, or the place, that might slow me down enough to decide, I really don't need this tonight, but if I keep the apps and keep it really simple, it's too easy to do. So again, that's if I'm trying to eliminate it and if I'm trying to start a new behavior, are there any barriers I need to remove? How can I make this easier?

Do I need to put my shoes next to the door so that I remember to go for a walk each day? Do I need to put some water bottles in the fridge each night to make sure that tomorrow I drink the amount of water that I think is healthiest for me? Creating habits that you want, that are congruent with your identity and eliminating habits that you don't want, or that are interfering with you reaching your goals. So I invite you to practice these steps. Start by identifying only one or two habits you're going to focus on. What a lot of us do in this community is we get very excited and we say, I'm going to do this. I'm going to do this. I'm going to do this. I'm going to stop doing this. I won't do this. And it gets overwhelming, and we lose track of all of it.

Focus on one or two changes at a time, when you're really strong on these, you can add another one, when you're really strong on these, you can add another one. Build it slowly. All right? I hope you're having a great day. I look forward to hearing from you in the forum, and tomorrow we're going to talk about emotional eating. So I'll see you then. Take good care, everybody.