

W E L L N E S S   S E R I E S

# HOW TO MAKE EXERCISE A HABIT



Learn How to Stick to Your Workouts  
(Even if You Hate Exercising)

By The American Institute of Health Care Professionals, Inc.

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## Introduction - The Power of Habits

How many habits do you have?

If you stop to think about it, you probably have dozens, maybe even hundreds, of habits. Not all of them are good habits of course. Some habits, like cursing or drinking sugary soda, are not great for you. How did you acquire those habits – the good and the bad ones?

Did you decide to make them habits or did it just kind of happen?

For your bad habits, chances are they just sort of happened. One Coke at lunchtime turned into a soda at lunchtime and a soda in the afternoon, and it grew from there. Good habits happen this way as well. For example, you might have taken the stairs the first day of work, and ever since then you've always taken the stairs instead of the elevator.



Good habits can also be created, deliberately and with intention.

This report is about building the exercise habit, because most likely it's not going to "just happen" for you. If you're reading this report, then you have a desire to create a habit, and that's exactly what we're going to help you do.

Before we get to it, let's talk briefly about why habits are important and what type of habit setter you are. You see, the reason for the habit and your personality really impact whether you're successful or not.

## Why Habits Are Important

Habits are important because they take the guesswork and the thinking out of the process. For example, brushing your teeth could be considered a habit. You brush them every morning and probably every night. Do you think "Should I brush my teeth?" or does it happen pretty automatically? It's probably fairly automatic for most people. The exercise habit can be like that as well. It can be automatic so that you don't have to think, "Should I exercise?" You just do it.

Habits also hold you accountable. Going back to the tooth brushing habit again, when something becomes automatic, something that's good for you and your health, you get it done. You're accountable to yourself and to your health. When exercise is a habit and it's done automatically as part of your routine, you are accountable to yourself and your health. You're taking care of it.



Finally, another big benefit of habits is that they support you to succeed. Let's say for example that you're training for a 5K. You create a running and exercise habit that keeps this long term goal in mind. If the habit holds and you're able to follow through, then you'll be able to achieve your 5K goal. The same is true for weight loss goals, fitness goals, and other health and well-being goals. Habits make it possible to achieve them.

Okay, so let's next mention that people have different habit building personalities. Some people love to schedule, while others resist the calendar. Some people love tracking results, while others despise any sort of quantitative analysis of their lifestyle. Some people prefer to dive in and are inspired by large, seemingly impossible, goals. Others prefer to take it step by step.

This book is for all of those types of people, and all of those approaches are viable habit building personalities. What matters most, right now, is that you are aware of your habit building personality. Think about the habits that you're able to maintain successfully and those that you've repeatedly failed at. Think about why that might be the case and then read this book.

## 12 Approaches to Building the Exercise Habit

In this book we offer 12 different approaches to building the exercise habit. Some you're going to roll your eyes at. Those aren't for you. Others, at least one or two, will click with you. You'll nod your head and think to yourself, "I can do that. This one is right for me." Bingo. That's the one that you take action on. So let's get started!

### 1. The Small Step Approach

The small step approach works like this... Joy wants to create a running habit. In her mind she looks down the road one year from now and she's bounding out of bed every morning and running three miles before breakfast. Joy's a go-getter! However, Joy is also a small step type of habit maker.

So instead of running three miles this morning, she gets up and runs for five minutes. It's a time that she knows she can commit to. She hits the treadmill and puts in exactly five minutes of running. She does every day for a week.



Next week, she hits the treadmill and runs for 10 minutes. (She thought about running for 7 minutes instead but figured she might take smaller steps down the road and she can do anything for 10 minutes, right?) The week after she runs for 15 minutes, then twenty, and so on. Eventually, she's getting up every morning and running for 30 minutes or about three miles.

Small steps can get the job done. It's a way to ease yourself into a habit and to allow both your body and your mind to acclimate to the new routine. For many, it's much easier to imagine exercising for a few minutes or putting in a small distance in the beginning than it is to imagine getting out of bed and putting in an hour of time.

I know a woman who literally started at five minutes a day and by the time the year was out, she was jogging for two hours every day. She'd lost 20 pounds and was full of energy and vitality. This system worked for her, and it can work for you too.

The small step approach can work a number of different ways. For example, if moving your body for 30 minutes doesn't seem like a big deal, but running for 30 minutes does, then why not run for one minute and walk for 29 today. Run for two minutes next week and walk for 28. Day by day, week by week you build your physical and mental endurance, and before you know it you've achieved the habit you were aiming for.

## 2. The Dive Right in Approach

The opposite of the one small step at a time approach to habit setting is the dive right in approach. This is a "go big or go home" mindset that works for people who are inspired and motivated by large, and often seemingly impossible, goals.

These are the people who go from couch to marathon in three months. They make a decision and often take immediate action. The key to this method working successfully is that the motivation has to be significant enough to get you through weeks of habit forming behavior.

For example, imagine Tracy decides that she is going to take a trip to France and ride a route that's the same as a stage of the Tour de France. She hasn't ridden a bike in years nor does she exercise regularly. But the dream of riding a bike up the mountains fills her with such joy that she jumps on her bike and rides for an hour every morning and goes for a long ride on the weekends.

Those first few weeks of riding and exercise are going to be physically challenging, if not painful. However, the habit can be formed and the difficulty set aside because of Tracy's motivation.

Six months later, Tracy is riding her bike in the mountains of Europe and she's in great shape. She's cultivated a bike riding habit by biting off a goal that may have seemed crazy to others, including herself if she stopped long enough to think about it.

If the goal isn't enough to keep you motivated through the difficult times, then this approach won't work. It has to be something that excites you. It's one of the reasons why many people sign up for an event like a marathon; because the scale of the goal is enough to get them off the couch and exercising every single day.

However, you don't need an event for your goal. Your goal might be to lose 100 pounds, to swim across the English Channel, or to run a 21 minute 5K. If you choose this approach, make sure that your goal is something that will motivate you to persevere and create a habit that lasts.

### 3. Setting Goals

We just talked about setting goals, and that's a large part of what habit formation really is. Your desire to create an exercise habit is in and of itself, a goal. Whether you exercise for five minutes this week and ten the next or you start training for an epic trail race, both approaches require you to set goals. So let's talk about goals for a bit.

Are you familiar with the concept of SMART goals? It's an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time Bound.

Some people thrive on this type of goal and, to be honest, regardless of your habit formation personality it's a good idea to consider these elements of your exercise habit goals. Let's take a look at each letter individually for a second.

#### **Specific**

What EXACTLY do you want to achieve? Do you want to lose 30 pounds, exercise for 30 minutes a day, or reach a deadlift PR of 200 pounds? Many people approach exercise habits like this; "I just want to exercise every day" or "I want to lose weight." This approach doesn't work. You have to figure out what you want so that you can create a path to achieve it.

You have to be specific. So close your eyes and imagine your goal. What do you want your life to look like? What specific exercise habit do you want to create? Keep in mind that it might be a bit complicated. "I want to strength train, do cardio, and some yoga" could turn into "I want to strength train twice a week, do cardio three times a week, and yoga twice a week." From there, you can build a plan and a habit.

#### **Measurable**

This is simple enough; how can you quantify your habit? Distance, time, and frequency are all measurable. Run for 30 minutes, ride your bike for 15 miles, row for 30 calories, exercise five days a week, etc.

#### **Attainable**

Your goal must be something that's possible. For example, running a marathon tomorrow or losing 100 pounds next week are not attainable goals. Running a marathon in a few months or losing 100 pounds in a year are attainable – with a good habit and plan.

## Relevant and Time Bound

Relevant simply means that your goal must relate to the habit that you want to cultivate. And Time Bound isn't applicable to all goals. However, often if there's a time limit then it makes it easier to create a plan. For example, "I want to run a marathon in six months," or "I want to lose 60 pounds by January." The time limit helps you focus on your habit.

So goals are a part of many successful habits, but they're not the only element of success, especially when we're talking about exercise habits so let's continue.

## 4. Schedule It

Sometimes creating a habit is as easy as putting it on your calendar. If you want to go to the gym every morning then, for some, simply putting it on the calendar means it will happen. I know, that sounds too easy.

Yet there are some habit forming personalities that work this way. If you put it on the calendar and make time for it, it will happen. It's like adding it to the calendar means it's a priority. You do it without thinking about it because it's on your schedule.

Think about how you organize your life right now. Are you a scheduler? Do you live by your calendar? For example, Marie schedules everything. She schedules when she checks her email. She schedules household chores, lunch, work time, appointments, and yes, she schedules her exercise.

It works for her. It offers her the structure she needs. Each "Appointment" is tended to because it's on her calendar. If this sounds like you, consider embracing this habit forming approach.

## 5. Accountability

Accountability is a strong motivator for some. The word "accountable" means that you're responsible for your actions. Of course we're all responsible for our actions and non-actions, but for some it takes a little extra accountability to help create a habit.

For example, signing up for a gym membership is a form of accountability. The monthly payments and the expense can help hold you accountable. Some people tend to be motivated when they're accountable to someone else. There are actually a few ways that you can leverage this to help you create an exercise habit.



## **Exercise Partner(s)**

An exercise partner can help you feel accountable to them for your behavior.

For example, Joe and Cindy decide to be exercise partners. They agree to meet at the gym every morning at six.

Both Joe and Cindy show up morning after morning because they don't want to let the other person down. They create a habit through accountability to one another.

## **Join a Team**

When you join a team, for example a softball team, you're now accountable to the team. Not only do you want to practice and improve your skills, you need to show up to practices and games and honor your commitment to the team. Additionally, a team often has their own practice schedule, which can help you stay accountable and create an exercise habit.

## **Be a Role Model**

Do you have a child, sibling, or friend who needs a boost and a bit of motivation to exercise? There are some personalities that find it's easier to create a habit if they are able to take on the status of a role model. You're accountable to the person that you're trying to help out.

For example, your child joins the track team and needs to practice on their own. You want to start your own running exercise habit. By being a role model to your child, you can join them on their practice runs and achieve your own exercise habit goals.

Accountability doesn't work for everyone. However, it can be a significant resource if it suits your habit forming personality.

## 6. The Fun Factor

If it's fun then the habit is easy to create, right? Well, that actually does work quite well for some people. If you're having fun, then it's easy to make something a priority in your life. It's easier to make it a habit.

For example, Julie loves to ice skate. She used to skate as a child, and when thinking about exercise the only time she ever remembered having any fun was when she was skating.



So she decided to try it again as an adult and guess what? Once she tied those laces and hit the ice, a passion was renewed. Now Julie heads to her local rink every morning for an hour of pleasure, and exercise.

The problem is that most people, when they think about exercise, don't think that it's fun. Exercise for many is something that they feel they're supposed to do. It's a chore. It's like taking your vitamins or eating your veggies. You may not love it but you do it because you're supposed to.

That's not the way it has to be. Try looking back at what you used to enjoy. What did you love to do as a child? If nothing comes to mind, then look forward. What have you always wanted to try? What looks like it might be fun?

For example, boxing or rock climbing might look like something fun to try. What about ballroom dancing or fencing? Exercise doesn't necessarily mean lacing up your running shoes and hitting the treadmill or elliptical for an hour. It can mean that if you want it to. There's nothing wrong with that type of exercise. It's great.

But learning to mambo or scaling an indoor rock wall is exercise too. If you're motivated by fun and want to add more fun to your day, then consider looking for movements and activities that work your body and bring a smile to your face. You may find that the exercise habit is the easiest thing you've ever done for yourself.

## 7. Reward Yourself

We've talked about different types of motivation as the foundation for creating an exercise habit. You might be motivated by rewards. For example, "If I exercise every day for thirty minutes, I will buy myself a massage."

The key to making a reward-based exercise habit work is to make sure that:

A: You don't just skip the habit and buy yourself the reward anyway.

B: The reward is actually motivating for you.

C: The exercise habit is one that you can realistically achieve. Just because you're rewarding yourself doesn't mean you have to create an exercise routine that's near impossible to follow through on.

If you're not sure if a reward-based exercise habit would work for you, start by imagining your day with a reward-based habit. What would you reward yourself with? It can be anything from a relaxing book and a bath at the end of the day if you exercise, to a vacation if you exercise five days a week for three months. Clothing, outings, and even a day off from work and responsibilities can be exciting and motivating rewards as well.

Once you've visualized the reward, what's the habit that you'd like to cultivate? Remember to use a SMART goal process. Be specific and make it measurable. You have to know what you want to accomplish before you can reward yourself for the accomplishment, right?

If you start feeling excited and motivated when you begin visualizing your habit and your reward, this may be the exercise habit building tactic that works for you.

## 8. Train for an Event

The second tactic that we discussed was to dive in and choose a huge, seemingly impossible goal. Many of the examples for that tactic were based on events. Run a marathon, swim the English Channel and so on. Event training can be quite motivating and a great way to support you to create an exercise habit.

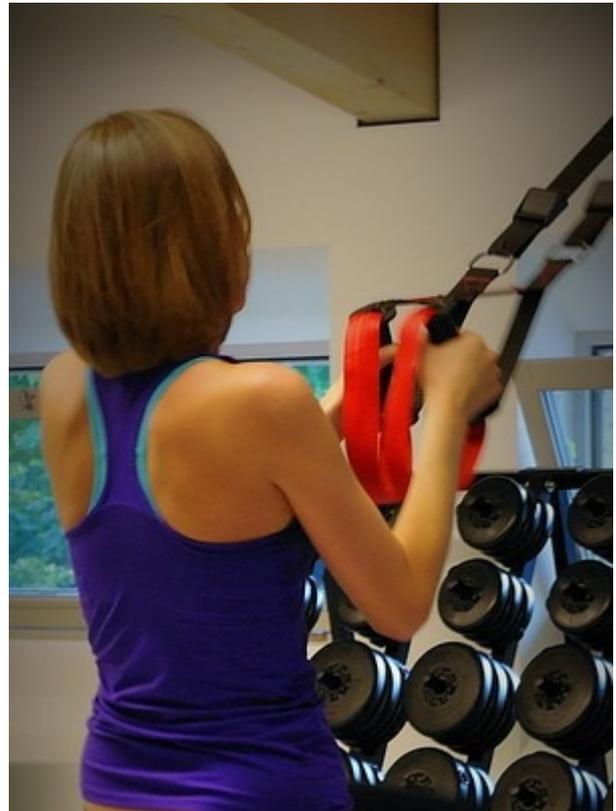
However, an event doesn't have to be something monumental. You might train for a 5k run or a charity bike ride. You might train for a dance competition or to get your yellow belt in karate.

Training for an event is a motivator for many because it gives their exercise habit structure. You have to create a plan, a daily plan, to follow through on so that you're able to successfully participate in the event you've chosen.

If you're competitive then events work well because you will be motivated to win or to get a personal record. But you don't have to be competitive to leverage this tactic to build your exercise habit. Participating in athletic events can be fun. There's a different energy in the air during an event, and the community and camaraderie surrounding events is motivating and exciting.

If you think this tactic might work for you, consider looking ahead a few months. Try three to six months initially. Align potential events with what you're interested in. Keep in mind that humans like to compete in just about every way possible.

If you swim, there will be swimming competitions. If you run, ride your bike, box, or dance there will be events to participate in. From roller derby to the Rumba, there are events that you can sign up and train for.



## 9. Variety Versus Routine

Sam lived her exercise life believing that a person had to pick one thing and focus on that one thing. She danced for years. When she was tired of dancing, she tried running. She ran for years. Then she tried cycling. Sam cycled through a number of different fitness routines.

She'd inevitably get bored and stop. She became a habitual quitter. Nothing really interested her long enough to stick with it. This meant that whenever she got motivated enough to try something new, she was always a beginner and she was always bored.

Eventually, Sam tried a cross-training program. She hoped that the variety would be enough to keep her interested. She was right. The combination of strength training, cardio, and gymnastics hooked her. She's been exercising and with the same program for four years and rarely misses a workout.

Variety, you see, can be the key to building an exercise habit. Some people prefer structure and routine. Others need variety to stay interested and engaged. If Sam's story sounds familiar to you, or you feel like variety might be the key, consider finding or creating an exercise program that supports different daily activities.

You can find these types of programs streaming online. You can join a cross-training group or club. You can also hire a personal trainer or join a small group training program that provides you with the variety you crave.

You can even purchase your own equipment, follow a fitness blogger or the Crossfit.com blog and perform the workouts they've programmed. There are many opportunities for variety. Don't let boredom get in the way of your exercise habit; embrace different activities each day.



## 10. Develop a Ritual

A ritual is a practice that helps you get in the exercise mindset. It supports you to create a consistent habit. For example, some athletes listen to a specific type of music or a particular song before they work out. Getting dressed in your fitness apparel can be part of a ritual.

Your ritual might be as straightforward as getting up, getting dressed, grabbing a water bottle and heading out the door. A ritual or a routine integrates your new exercise habit right into it. It makes it part of a series of habits so that it's easier to make it part of your life.

A ritual can also help you shift your focus away from "I don't want to do this," or "I'm too tired to exercise today." Instead, you start preparing your mind and body to perform the exercise and not doing it isn't even a thought.

## 11. Are You a Beginner or a Finisher?

Some people love starting things. They get tremendous joy in the process of taking a great idea and beginning the process. Others love the process of finishing. When something is done, they feel satisfaction.

This can be an important part of your exercise habit formation. For example, if you know that you love starting something then it will help you be more aware of the middle stages of your habit process. You know that you'll need to find a method to stay excited and motivated about your exercise habit.

And if you know you love finishing things then you know that you'll have to make the initial stages of your exercise habit exciting and interesting. Simply knowing this about your personality can help you choose the right path to creating an exercise habit that you can follow through on.

## 12. What to Do When the Habit Isn't Sticking

Creating a habit isn't always easy. Even if you have a strong desire to create an exercise habit, if you don't approach it with your personality and motivations in mind, it can be quite difficult.

And let's be completely up front and say that sometimes even if you think you have a handle on creating a strong exercise habit, it might not work out. That's okay. There are some steps you can take to figure it out and move forward.

- Ask yourself why. Why aren't you able to follow through and create the habit that you want to create? For example, maybe you thought that training for a marathon was going to be the motivator that finally got you out the door and running every day. You found a marathon training plan and started following the program.

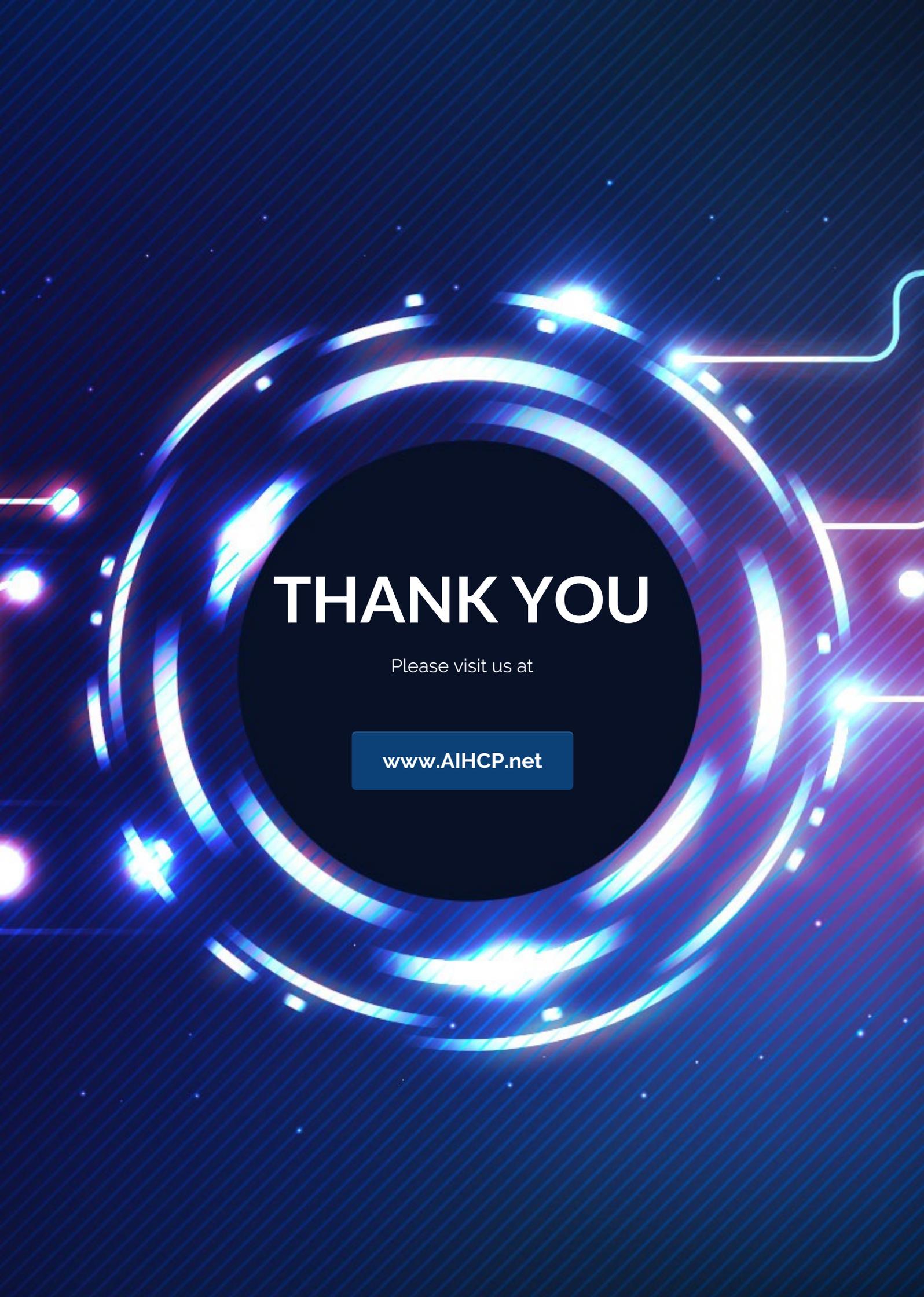
Maybe one day you got too busy to run or you got hurt or sick. One day off turns into two and then suddenly you're a few weeks behind in the plan. What happened? Maybe the marathon training motivator wasn't the right plan. Or maybe nothing happened and you're being too hard on yourself and you can pick back up where you left off and continue moving forward with your exercise habit.

- Assess what does work. Examine habits that you've been able to make work. What do they have in common? Why do they work for you when other types of habits don't? For example, maybe you have an excellent habit of putting things away where they belong right after you use them, but you can't create an exercise habit.

Maybe the reason you can put things away is because that habit is simple. Perhaps your exercise habit is overcomplicated. Look for links in your successes because they can tell you a lot about how to succeed with other desirable habits.

- Try something different. If what you tried isn't working, try something different. Maybe you've always tried to train for events and that never works. Instead, why not give variety a try or do something that's fun.

The first step is often the most important but it isn't something to ponder for weeks on end. Make a choice. Decide what you want to do and get started. Create a plan and follow through. Also consider that your approach may be a combination of tactics covered in this book. For example, maybe you train for an event but you train for it in small steps. Maybe you set a huge goal but you work toward that goal with a group of friends. Creating an exercise habit may not be simple, but it's worth the time and attention. Find what works for you and stick to it.



# THANK YOU

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