

APC Mental Health Newsletter
August 2023



Hello, my name is Tyler. I am the new Psychologist at Advanced Primary Care. You may have met me during one of your visits to APC over the past few months. I am going to start sending out semi-regular emails based on my expertise so everyone can benefit from my presence here!



This month I am going to start this series by talking about habit management. When we think about habits, we may think of unhealthy habits such as biting your nails, or good habits such as eating fruit every day. For our purposes, we will be talking about how we can control the habits that may help us in achieving the most out of our health and maximizing the service we get from all the health professionals at our clinic. Whether you are given homework for stretching by our massage therapist, or if you are told to stop touching your face to prevent acne,

here is how you can successfully follow through with that!

We will start with **creating healthy habits**. Like all things we want to achieve in life, it is helpful to have a tangible goal. Decide what it is you are trying to accomplish and have a step-by-step plan of how you will achieve this. I will use the example that my goal is to hike a mountain in Kananaskis by next spring. To do this, I am going to need to physically condition myself in the months leading up. Some steps I can take are to do some exercises daily and eat well. How am I going to make these things a habit?

Consistency is one of the biggest factors in maintaining a habit.

Doing something daily as opposed to every other day will have

better retention long-term. You will also find yourself more motivated to do these things if they are rewarded in some way. This is known as **reinforcement**. You may experience positive reinforcement if after engaging in these habits you find that you feel better and that you are happier with your body tone. These things are experienced in the long term, so implementing immediate reinforcements may be more beneficial to get you started. Setting up a reward for yourself after exercising such as allowing yourself to enjoy an episode of your favorite television show may make you more inclined to complete these exercises every day. However, as an autonomous adult there is nothing stopping you from skipping the exercise and jumping straight to watching TV, so it is helpful to have



somebody keeping you **accountable** for your goals. Eventually, you should be doing this as part of your daily routine and ideally you are achieving your goal!



Now for **getting rid of habits**. Like developing a habit, we may stop engaging in a habit if there is something that reinforces this. For example, if every time we reach for a cookie from the cookie jar somebody smacks our hand, we are being punished for the habit and we are likely to stop this to avoid the punishment. We do not always have somebody to slap us on the wrist to keep us in line, so you may need to be creative in making the things that are bad for you **less appealing**. Access can also be a factor, in that

making something harder to do will make you less likely to engage in that behavior. If you find yourself with the habit of staying up very late on your phone, placing your phone charger outside of the bedroom would make your phone harder to access while you are supposed to be sleeping.

I will leave you with an article about forming healthy habits that also includes a handy template for you to write out your progress with your goals:

Gardner, B., Lally, P., Wardle, J. (2012). Making health habitual: the psychology of 'habit-formation' and general practice. *British Journal of General Practice*, 62(605), 664-666.

<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp12X659466>



Please feel free to reach me directly at tyler.schamehorn@advancedprimarycare.ca if you have any questions or feedback with regards to this newsletter.

I look forward to seeing you around the clinic and hope you enjoy the rest of the summer!

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