

Title Slide	Habits
Slide 1	Let's talk about how the brain works as we develop old habits and form new ones. Habits are created by repetition.
Slide 2	When we first learn to do something, like playing a musical instrument or riding a bike or even tying our shoes, we have to think about the task, focus on it and concentrate.
Slide 3	Over time, as we repeat the actions over and over again, we form deep neural grooves in our brain — like deep rivers with flowing water — and we are able to do those actions without thinking about them. Something that once took an enormous amount of concentration is now on “automatic pilot,” which frees us up to focus on other things.
Slide 4	This is how habits are formed. When the repetition of neurons firing together has occurred often enough, a pattern is created in our brains that is largely automatic and can occur <i>without conscious direction</i> .
Slide 5	Not only do we have skill-based patterns, we also have emotional patterns and mental patterns in our brains these have been created over time and which inform our behaviors. Maybe we learned early on that if we got angry people would back off. Or if we were deeply disappointed about something, food made us feel better.
Slide 6	The problem with ingrained habits is that they also allow us to finish a bag of chips without even noticing it or pick up a cigarette even if we don't want it or settle into the couch to watch TV without really giving it a second thought. Following this “default position” or neural groove in the brain is easy, automatic and requires no conscious decision-making.
Slide 7	But change is always an option; always possible. We can consciously choose to change our minds, redirect our attention and revise how we respond to life circumstances. The mind has the power to direct the brain's activity and ultimately to change the very physiology of the brain and the habits that have been formed over our lifetime.
Slide 8	Habits also have lots of connections. Think about the triggers that are part of a habit for you.
Slide 9	For example, let's take Mary. Mary has a habit of eating snacks from the time she gets home from work until she goes to bed at night. Just walking in the door at home at the end of a long day triggers thoughts of snacks. Watching TV at night, seeing commercials, hearing someone else eating a snack, seeing ice cream in the freezer, thinking about her stressful day; all serve as triggers for Mary and reinforce her habit.
Slide 10	So when we want to make a change in our behavior, when we want to break an old habit and form a new one, we can use this principle of lots of connections to help us create a new, strong network within our brain.



Slide 11	So, how do we start forming connections in the brain. The first step is to envision what it is that we want in lots of detail and why we want it. Pro athletes use this technique when they think through every detail of the way they want to play and the result that they want in an important game. Research has shown that envisioning in this way can significantly improve success.
Slide 12	Envisioning what we want in terms of our health and well-being and associating that with all of our senses and positive emotions helps us to begin to form new neural pathways. Some people journal as they envision, some people draw, some people create visions boards. However you do it, make the vision as vivid and real for you as possible.
Slide 13	Once we know what we want, we can deliberately create new habits to get us there. Repeating the new habit will take focus and concentration at first, but over time it will become more automatic.
Slide 14	Join us for our next tip where will we be talking about how to create new habits in our everyday life and the easiest possible way to make them stick.
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