

13 MENTAL MODELS FOR
HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHANGE

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A message from Natasha

A healthy lifestyle isn't shaped by one big decision. It's built through the small choices we make each day.

How we approach change.

How we respond when motivation drops.

How we return to habits over time.

Psychology plays an important role in this process. Understanding how habits form, how motivation works, and how environments shape behaviour can make healthy choices easier to sustain.

This guide introduces a collection of mental models that can help you think differently about health, habits, and behaviour change. Each one offers a simple idea or perspective you can experiment with in your own routine.

Some will resonate more than others. The aim isn't to use every model at once, but to explore them, test them, and keep the ones that support your lifestyle.

Small shifts in thinking often lead to meaningful changes in behaviour.

Sometimes the right idea, applied consistently, is enough to move things forward.



Fresh Start Effect

How It Works:

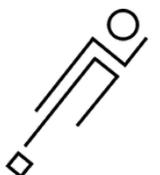
People are more likely to start new habits after psychological “fresh starts” such as the beginning of a week, month, birthday, or life change. These moments create a sense of separation from past behaviour and make change feel more achievable.

When to Use:

Use this when beginning a new routine, restarting after a break, or trying to re-establish a habit that has slipped.

How to Use:

Choose a meaningful starting point such as Monday, the first of the month, or a personal milestone. Treat it as a reset moment and begin the behaviour you want to build.



Temptation Bundling

How It Works:

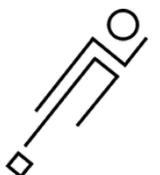
Temptation bundling pairs something enjoyable with a behaviour that requires effort. Linking a reward with the activity helps your brain associate the habit with something positive, increasing motivation and adherence.

When to Use:

Use this if exercise feels like a chore or when motivation is low.

How to Use:

Combine exercise with something you enjoy. For example, listen to a favourite podcast while walking or save a playlist you enjoy for workouts.



Identity Voting

How It Works:

Every action you take reinforces the type of person you are becoming. Rather than focusing only on outcomes, behaviour change becomes more sustainable when it is tied to identity.

When to Use:

Use this when deciding whether to follow through on a habit, especially when motivation is low.

How to Use:

Ask yourself: “What would a healthy person do in this moment?”
Choose the behaviour that aligns with the identity you want to build.



Two-day Rule

How It Works:

Missing a habit once is normal, but missing it twice often begins a pattern. The two-day rule protects consistency by preventing small lapses from becoming long breaks.

When to Use:

Use this when your routine is disrupted by work, travel, or unexpected events.

How to Use:

If you miss a workout or healthy habit one day, make it a priority to return to it the next day.



Implementation Windows

How It Works:

Strict schedules can make habits fragile when life becomes unpredictable. Implementation windows create flexible time ranges rather than fixed times.

When to Use:

Use this if rigid schedules make it difficult to stay consistent.

How to Use:

Instead of “I train at 6pm,” choose a window such as “I train between 5–7pm.” Or, instead of having set days to train, aim to train 3 times a week but days are changeable. This allows flexibility while maintaining commitment.



Effort-Reward Loop

How It Works:

Your brain is more likely to repeat behaviours that are followed by a reward. Reinforcing healthy actions strengthens the habit loop over time.

When to Use:

Use this when trying to make exercise feel more satisfying and sustainable.

How to Use:

Create a positive routine after training, such as a relaxing shower, smoothie, or walk. This helps your brain associate effort with reward.



Momentum Rule

How It Works:

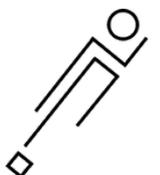
Starting an activity is often the hardest part. Once movement begins, it becomes easier to continue.

When to Use:

Use this when motivation feels low and you struggle to begin a workout.

How to Use:

Focus only on *starting* the activity rather than completing the entire session.



Your Future Self

How It Works:

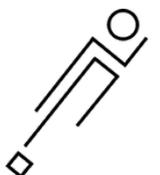
People often prioritise short-term comfort over long-term wellbeing. Thinking about the needs of your future self can shift decisions toward healthier behaviours.

When to Use:

Use this when deciding between an easy option now and a healthier choice that benefits you later.

How to Use:

Ask yourself: “What would my future self appreciate that I did today?”



Environmental Design

How It Works:

Your environment strongly influences your behaviour. Small cues around you can make healthy actions easier or harder to perform. When the environment supports the behaviour you want, you rely less on motivation and willpower.

When to Use:

Use this when you find yourself forgetting habits, feeling unmotivated, or repeatedly choosing less healthy options.

How to Use:

Adjust your environment so the healthy choice becomes the easy choice. Lay out gym clothes the night before, keep a water bottle visible, and move less healthy foods out of sight.



Effort Memory Bias

How It Works:

People tend to remember workouts as more difficult than they actually were. This can discourage future exercise.

When to Use:

Use this when you find yourself avoiding workouts because they feel overwhelming in memory.

How to Use:

After exercising, reflect on what felt good or satisfying to reinforce positive memory of the experience.



Minimum Standard

How It Works:

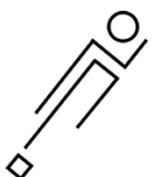
Large goals can create resistance and all-or-nothing thinking. The minimum viable workout lowers the barrier to starting by focusing on the smallest useful version of the habit.

When to Use:

Use this when motivation is low, time is limited, or you feel tempted to skip exercise altogether.

How to Use:

Commit to the smallest possible version of the behaviour, such as 10 minutes of movement. Starting often creates momentum that leads to doing more.



Commitment Devices

How It Works:

Commitment devices create external accountability that makes it harder to abandon a habit. When a behaviour is tied to social expectations or financial investment, follow-through becomes more likely.

When to Use:

Use this when you struggle with consistency or find it easy to postpone exercise.

How to Use:

Create accountability by booking classes, training with a partner, or prepaying for sessions that encourage you to follow through.



Attentional Anchors

How It Works:

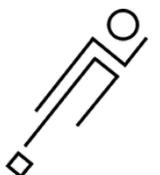
Your attention shapes your experience during exercise. Focusing on controllable sensations keeps your mind engaged and reduces distractions that can make workouts feel harder or less enjoyable.

When to Use:

Use this during workouts when your mind drifts, motivation drops, or exercise begins to feel monotonous.

How to Use:

Direct your attention to simple physical cues such as your breathing rhythm, muscle engagement, or the quality of your movement.





Health and wellbeing are ongoing practices, not end points.

What matters most is not finding the perfect strategy, but developing the awareness to notice what influences your behaviour and the flexibility to adjust your routines over time.

The ideas in this guide are simply starting points. Use them to experiment, observe what works for you, and gradually shape habits that support the way you want to live.

If you'd like more support applying these principles in a structured way, you're welcome to **register your interest** in joining a health and performance cohort.

Keep building,

Matasha

