



Better Than Before: What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits--to Sleep More, Quit Sugar, Procrastinate Less, and Generally Build a Happier Life

By Gretchen Rubin

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New York Times Bestseller
Washington Post Bestseller

The author of the blockbuster *New York Times* bestsellers, *The Happiness Project* and *Happier at Home*, tackles the critical question: How do we change?

Gretchen Rubin's answer: through *habits*. Habits are the invisible architecture of everyday life. It takes work to make a habit, but once that habit is set, we can harness the energy of habits to build happier, stronger, more productive lives.

So if habits are a key to change, then what we really need to know is: *How do we change our habits?*

Better than Before answers that question. It presents a practical, concrete framework to allow readers to understand their habits—and to change them for good. Infused with Rubin's compelling voice, rigorous research, and easy humor, and packed with vivid stories of lives transformed, *Better than Before* explains the (sometimes counter-intuitive) core principles of habit formation.

Along the way, Rubin uses herself as guinea pig, tests her theories on family and friends, and answers readers' most pressing questions—oddly, questions that other writers and researchers tend to ignore:

- Why do I find it tough to create a habit for something I *love* to do?
- Sometimes I can change a habit overnight, and sometimes I can't change a habit, no matter how hard I try. Why?
- How quickly can I change a habit?
- What can I do to make sure I stick to a new habit?

- How can I help someone else change a habit?
- Why can I keep habits that benefit others, but can't make habits that are just for me?

Whether readers want to get more sleep, stop checking their devices, maintain a healthy weight, or finish an important project, habits make change possible. Reading just a few chapters of *Better Than Before* will make readers eager to start work on their own habits—even before they've finished the book.

From the Hardcover edition.

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- Sales Rank: #22683 in eBooks
- Published on: 2015-03-17
- Released on: 2015-03-17
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

“We are totally comfortable calling Gretchen Rubin’s new book, *Better Than Before: Mastering the Habits of Our Everyday Lives*, life-changing.”

—*Better Homes & Gardens*

“If anyone can help us stop procrastinating, start exercising or get organized, it’s Gretchen Rubin. The happiness guru takes a sledgehammer to old-fashioned notions about change.”

—*Parade*

“It’s exciting to find a self-help book that’s not only full of eye-opening insight but also provides practical tips to help you procrastinate and stress less, exercise and eat more healthfully, and spend time on activities that matter. We’re really glad that Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*, decided to investigate her affinity for habits, because in the process she’s come up with a great guide to help us lay the foundation of a more satisfying life. Best of all, *Better Than Before* is a really fun read—Rubin’s friendliness, candor, and humor mirror a lively conversation with a best friend.” —**Apple iBooks**

“*The Happiness Project* lays out life’s essential goals...Her new book, *Better Than Before: Mastering the Habits of Our Everyday Lives*, serves as a kind of detailed instruction manual on how to achieve them.”

—*New York Times Sunday Book Review*

“In *Better Than Before: Mastering the Habits of Our Everyday Lives*, Gretchen Rubin picks up where [William] James left off, integrating a wealth of insight from psychology, sociology, and anthropology in an illuminating field guide to harnessing the transformative power of habit in modern life.”

—*Brain Pickings*

“Change can be good. Particularly if it helps us live longer, healthier, indeed, happier lives — the objective of Rubin’s latest project.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

“Author Gretchen Rubin says most people fall into one of four motivation types. Knowing yours is key to taking on new habits.”

—*Lifehacker*

“Gretchen Rubin... [is] lighthearted and inviting—full of insights that sound familiar and advice that sounds less like what you should do and more like what you want to do.... With her focus on taking first steps and creating early successes, this is a refreshing take on how to change stubborn patterns that limit what we can enjoy about our lives.” —*Audiofile Magazine*

“Do you have a bad habit you’re trying to shake, or a good one you wish you could cultivate? Gretchen Rubin is one of the most charming and erudite authors of her generation. Here, she uses her gifts to help you eat right, sleep well, stop procrastinating, and start enjoying all that life has to offer.”

—**Susan Cain, New York Times bestselling author of *Quiet***

“Gretchen Rubin combines deep research and observations from her own life to explain how habits emerge and—more important—how they can change. It’s indispensable for anyone hoping to overhaul how they (almost unthinkingly) behave.”

—**Charles Duhigg**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Power of Habit*

“Filled with insights about our patterns of behavior, *Better Than Before* addresses one of life’s big and timeless questions: how can we transform ourselves? In a way that’s thought-provoking, surprising, and often funny, Gretchen Rubin provides us with the tools to build a life that truly reflects our goals and values.”

—**Arianna Huffington**, founder of the *Huffington Post* and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Thrive*

“Is there a habit in your life you’d like to change? If so, here’s your first step: Read this book. It’s loaded with practical, everyday tips and techniques that will guide you to success.”

—**Dan Heath**, *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of *Made to Stick*, *Switch*, and *Decisive*

“Almost everyone wants to be ‘better’—slimmer, smarter, better looking, more interesting, more productive—and we want to know we’re improving, we want the reinforcing evidence. Gretchen Rubin’s new masterpiece, *Better Than Before*, shows us how. Unlike other books on habits, Rubin’s book gives us the specific tools and a blueprint for getting back on track—the fast track.”

—**Brian Wansink, Ph.D.**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Slim by Design* and *Mindless Eating*

“With bold and original insights, Gretchen Rubin reveals the hidden truths about how to change our habits—from resisting junk food and hitting the gym to ending procrastination and saving money. *Better Than Before* is a gem, and the first habit you should form is reading a chapter every night.”

—**Adam Grant**, Wharton professor and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Give and Take*

“Gretchen Rubin’s superpower is curiosity. Luckily for us, she’s turned her passionate inquiry to the topic of making and mastering habits. Weaving together research, unforgettable examples, and her brilliant insight, *Better Than Before* is a force for real change. It rearranged what I thought I knew about my habits, and I’m better for it.”

—**Brené Brown**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Daring Greatly* and *The Gifts of Imperfection*

About the Author

Gretchen Rubin is one of the most thought-provoking and influential writers on the linked subjects of habits, happiness, and human nature. She’s the author of many books, including the blockbuster *New York Times* bestsellers, *Happier at Home* and *The Happiness Project*. Rubin has an enormous following, in print and online; her books have sold more than a million copies worldwide, in more than thirty languages, and on her popular daily blog, gretchenrubin.com, she reports on her adventures in pursuit of habits and happiness. Her podcast "Happier with Gretchen Rubin" was an iTunes "Best of 2015" pick. Rubin started her career in law, and was clerking for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor when she realized she wanted to be a writer. She lives in New York City with her husband and two daughters.

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A NOTE TO THE READER

Better Than Before tackles the question: *How do we change?* One answer—by using habits.

Habits are the invisible architecture of daily life. We repeat about 40 percent of our behavior almost daily, so our habits shape our existence, and our future. If we change our habits, we change our lives.

But that observation just raises another question: *Okay, then, how do we change our habits?* That's what this book seeks to answer.

But while *Better Than Before* explores how to change your habits, it won't tell you what particular habits to form. It won't tell you to exercise first thing in the morning, or to eat dessert twice a week, or to clear out your office. (Well, actually, there is *one* area where I do say what habit I think is best. But only one.)

The fact is, no one-size-fits-all solution exists. It's easy to dream that if we copy the habits of productive, creative people, we'll win similar success. But we each must cultivate the habits that work for *us*. Some people do better when they start small; others when they start big. Some people need to be held accountable; some defy accountability. Some thrive when they give themselves an occasional break from their good habits; others when they never break the chain. No wonder habit formation is so hard.

The most important thing is to *know ourselves*, and to choose the strategies that work for us.

Before you begin, identify a few habits that you'd like to adopt, or changes you'd like to make. Then, as you read, consider what steps you want to try. You may even want to note today's date on your book's flyleaf, so you'll remember when you began the process of change.

To help you shape your habits, I regularly post suggestions on my blog, and I've also created many resources to help you make your life better than before. But I hope that the most compelling inspiration is the book you hold in your hands.

I see habits through the lens of my own experience, so this account is colored by my particular personality and interests. "Well," you might think, "if everyone forms habits differently, why should I bother to read a book about what someone else did?"

During my study of habits and happiness, I've noticed something surprising: I often learn more from one person's idiosyncratic experiences than I do from scientific studies or philosophical treatises. For this reason, *Better Than Before* is packed with individual examples of habit changes. You may not be tempted by Nutella, or travel too much for work, or struggle to keep a gratitude journal, but we can all learn from each other.

It's simple to change habits, but it's not easy.

I hope that reading *Better Than Before* will encourage you to harness the power of habits to make change in your own life. Whenever you read this, and wherever you are, you're in the right place to begin.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO BEGIN

Some habit-formation strategies are familiar and obvious—like Monitoring or Scheduling—but others took me more time to understand. As I studied habits, I slowly began to recognize the tremendous importance of the time of beginning.

The most important step is the *first step*. All those old sayings are really true. Well begun is half done. Don't get it perfect, get it going. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Nothing is more exhausting than the task that's never started, and strangely, *starting* is often far harder than *continuing*.

That first step is tough. Every action has an ignition cost: getting myself to the gym and changed into my gym clothes can be more challenging than actually working out. That's why good habits are a tremendous help: they make the starting process automatic.

Without yet having a name for it, in fact, I'd invoked the power of the Strategy of First Steps as I was starting to write this book. I'd spent months reading and taking copious notes, and I had a giant document with a jumble of material about habits. This initial period of research for a book is always exhilarating, but

eventually I have to begin the painstaking labor of actual analysis and writing.

What was the most auspicious date to start? I asked myself. The first day of the week, or the month, or the year? Or my birthday? Or the start of the school year? Then I realized that I was beginning to invoke tomorrow logic.

Nope. *Begin now*. I was ready. Take the first step. It's enough to begin.

Now is an unpopular time to take a first step. Won't things be easier—for some not-quite-specified reason—in the future? I have a fantasy of what I'll be like tomorrow: Future-Gretchen will spontaneously start a good new habit, with no planning and no effort necessary; it's quite pleasant to think about how virtuous I'll be, *tomorrow*. But there is no Future-Gretchen, only Now-Gretchen.

A friend told me about how she used tomorrow logic: "I use a kind of magical thinking to procrastinate. I make up questionable rules like 'I can't start working at 10:10, I need to start on the hour' or 'It's already 4:00, it's too late to start working.' But the truth is that I should just *start*." It's common to hear people say, "I'll start my new habit after the holidays are over/I've settled into my new job/my kids are a little older." Or worse, the double-remove: "I'll start my new habit once I'm back in shape."

Tomorrow logic wastes time, and also it may allow us to deny that our current actions clash with our intentions. In an argument worthy of the White Queen, we tell ourselves, absolutely, I'm committed to reading aloud to my children, and I will read to them tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow—just not today.

The same tendency can lead us to overcommit to responsibilities that take place in the comfortably distant future—but eventually the future arrives, and then we're stuck. My father-in-law has a mental habit to correct for that kind of tomorrow logic. He told me, "If I'm asked to do something—give a speech, attend an event—I always imagine that it's happening next week. It's too easy to agree to do something that's six months off, then the time comes, and I'm sorry I agreed to do it."

When taking the first step toward a new habit, a key question from the Strategy of Distinctions is "Do I prefer to take small steps or big steps?"

Many people succeed best when they keep their starting steps as small and manageable as possible; by doing so, they gain the habit of the habit, and the feeling of mastery. They begin their new yoga routine by doing three poses, or start work on a big writing project by drafting a single sentence in a writing session.

As an exercise zealot, I was pleased when my mother told me that she was trying to make a habit of going for a daily walk.

"But I'm having trouble sticking to it," she told me.

"How far are you going?"

"Twice around Loose Park," she told me, "which is about two miles."

"Try going just *once* around the park," I suggested. That worked. When she started smaller, she was able to form the habit.

Small steps can be particularly helpful when we're trying to do something that seems overwhelming. If I can

get myself to take that first small step, I usually find that I can keep going. I invoked this principle when I was prodding myself to master Scrivener, a writers' software program. Scrivener would help me organize my enormous trove of notes, but I dreaded starting: installing the software; synchronizing between my laptop and desktop computers; and most difficult, figuring out how to use it.

Each day gave me a new opportunity to push the task off until tomorrow. Tomorrow, I'd feel like dealing with it. "Start *now*," I finally thought. "Just take the first step." I started with the smallest possible step, which was to find the website where I could buy the software. Okay, I thought. I can do that. And then I did. I had a lot of hard work ahead of me—it's a Secret of Adulthood: things often get harder before they get easier—but I'd started. The next day, with a feeling of much greater confidence and calm, I watched the tutorial video. Then I created my document. And then—I started my book.

However, some people do better when they push themselves more boldly; a big challenge holds their interest and helps them persist. A friend was determined to learn French, so he moved to France for six months.

Along those lines, the *Blast Start* can be a helpful way to take a first step. The Blast Start is the opposite of taking the smallest possible first step because it requires a period of high commitment. It's demanding, but its intensity can energize a habit. For instance, after reading Chris Baty's book *No Plot? No Problem!*—which explains how to write a novel in a month—I wrote a novel in thirty days, as a way to spark my creativity. This kind of shock treatment can't be maintained forever, but it's fun and gives momentum to the habit. A twenty-one-day project, a detox, a cleanse, an ambitious goal, a boot camp—by tackling *more* instead of *less* for a certain period, I get a surge of energy and focus. (Not to mention bragging rights.) In particular, I love the retreat model. Three times, I've set aside a few days to work on a book during every waking hour, with breaks only for meals and for exercise. These periods of intensity help fuel my daily writing habit.

However, a Blast Start is, by definition, unsustainable over the long term. It's very important to plan specifically how to shift from the intensity of the Blast Start into the habit that will continue indefinitely.

There's no right way or wrong way, just whatever works.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Elizabeth Wiggins:

Spent a free time and energy to be fun activity to accomplish! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or their own friends. Usually they undertaking activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic from the park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Do you need to something different to fill your personal free time/ holiday? May be reading a book might be option to fill your no cost time/ holiday. The first thing you ask may be what kinds of reserve that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the guide untitled Better Than Before: What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits--to Sleep More, Quit Sugar, Procrastinate Less, and Generally Build a Happier Life can be good book to read. May be it is usually best activity to you.

Philip Raber:

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know everything we want. A book is a set of written, printed, illustrated or blank sheet. Every year ended up being exactly added. This reserve Better Than Before: What I Learned About Making and Breaking Habits--to Sleep More, Quit Sugar, Procrastinate Less, and Generally Build a Happier Life was filled about science. Spend your spare time to add your knowledge about your science competence. Some people has different feel when they reading a book. If you know how big benefit of a book, you can sense enjoy to read a guide. In the modern era like at this point, many ways to get book which you wanted.

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Penny Risley:

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