Breaking Bad Health Habits and Developing Good Habits for Working from Home

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Why this talk?

- Covid-19 has disrupted our daily routines or habits
- Some of our habits have become potentially dangerous
- So....let’s talk about habits
  - How they are started and why we learn them?
  - Why are they hard to change?
  - What
What is a habit?

The Habit Loop

1. Reminder
   Trigger / Initiating event that start the habit

2. Routine
   Action we take. The habit itself

3. Reward
   Benefit from habit
How do Habits Form? First we learn...
With enough practice, what we learn becomes automatic when in the presence of certain cues.
How do Habits Form?

- Habits help us because they save us cognitive energy
- They allow us to pay attention to other activities
Working from home....

- Working from home improves creativity, but decreases productivity on more routine (habit) tasks
- Environmental cues will trigger different habits
- Habits triggered by home cues will interfere with work behavior
- Habits triggered by work cues will help get work behavior going
- Building new work-habits require predictable cues that are specific to work
What can you do?

- Re-establish your triggers for your old work habits
  - Set up home office to be as similar as possible to your work office
  - Keep daily routine the same
    - Wake-up time
    - Morning routine
What can you do?

- Try to limit mixing cues for work habits with cues for home habits
What can you do?

- Start new work at home habits
  - Establish a place and cues for work
  - Keep the routines the same day to day
  - Reinforce yourself for work done
  - Do things to keep your stress down
- Starting new habits feels cognitively draining
  - With practice it becomes easier
Bad Habits during COVID

STOP VIRUS

Your hands carry germs you can’t see.

How:
1. Wet your hands with clean water.
2. Soap them up.
3. Scrub them front and back, between your fingers, and under your nails.
4. Scrub for 20 seconds.
5. Rinse with clean water.
6. Dry hands with a clean towel or by air drying.
7. Repeat often.

When:
- After using the bathroom
- Before eating or cooking
- After blowing your nose
- After coughing or sneezing
- After touching animals
- Before and after visiting someone who is sick
- Anytime your hands are dirty

You can stop them from spreading. Wash your hands!

www.cdc.gov/handwashing
Bad Habits during COVID
How common are these hand-to-head habits?

- **3-23 times per hour people touch their face** (Kwok et al., 2015; Macias et al., 2009)
- **3.0%-7.3% chronic nail biting** (Houghton et al., 2018; Selles et al., 2015; Teng et al., 2002)
- **Similar prevalence across various populations and ethnicities** (Leibovici et al., 2015; Selles et al., 2015)
How habits are affected by emotion

Woods & Miltenberger (1996)

Bar chart showing the percentage of intervals for Hair Manipulation and Face Touching under different emotional states: Anxiety, Neutral, and Bored.
How do we undo these habits?

- Build new habits....
  - Awareness of old habits and their triggers
  - Prevent old habits from showing up in usual settings by replacing the old habit with a new behavior
  - Reinforce it
  - Reduce stress
  - Combined, these sets of procedures are called “Habit Reversal”

**Reduce Face Touching**

- **Increase Awareness**
  - Ask a partner to tell you when you touch your face
  - Wear perfume or bracelets on your wrists to remind you not to touch your face
  - Carry a pen and paper to record how many times you touch your face each day

- **Help Others**
  - Think of the people you are trying to protect by not touching your face
  - Gently remind others when you notice them touching their face

- **Do Other Things With Your Hands**
  - Put your hands in your pockets
  - Hold a ball or deck of cards in your hands
  - Make fists with both hands for one minute if you bring your hands near your face

- **Change Postures**
  - Keep your elbows off the table
  - Sit in chairs without armrests, or in the middle of the couch
  - Sit on your hands if it’s hard to not touch your face

- **Practice Relaxation Techniques**
  - Focus on taking long, slow, deep breaths and on relaxing muscles that feel tense
  - Sit in a quiet place and focus on the present moment rather than the past or future
  - Spend time in nature at a safe distance from others, even sitting under a tree
HR vs. WL for Skin Picking

- A 2(group) x 3 (pre, post, follow-up) mixed ANOVA was conducted to evaluate effect of HR on skin picking.
- Participants in HR group had a significant decrease from pretreatment to posttreatment and follow-up.
- Those in WL group did not change.
- Social validity ratings confirmed self-report.
- Treatment was acceptable.
HR vs Placebo for Nailbiting
(Twohig et al., 2003)

Random Assignment to 2 groups
- Habit Reversal
  - 1, 1 hour session; 2, 1/2 hour booster sessions
- Placebo Control
  - 1, 1 hour session; 2, 1/2 hour booster sessions
  - Discussed biting habit weekly with no suggestions for change