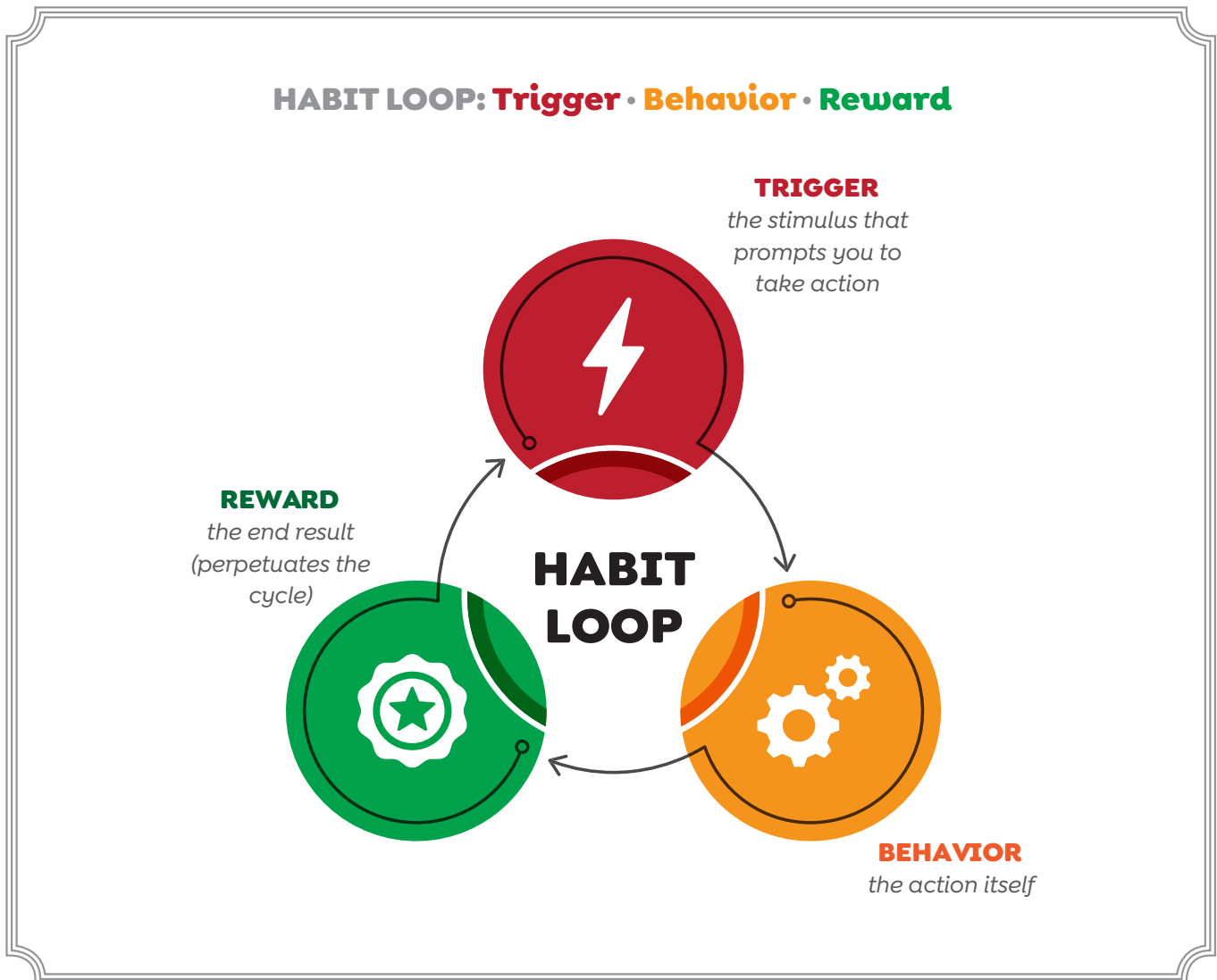# Habit Loops

A habit is defined as *"a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up."* Whether we are aware of it or not, we establish our habits through the framework of the habit loop:

HABIT LOOP: Trigger · Behavior · Reward

TRIGGER
the stimulus that prompts you to take action

HABIT LOOP

REWARD
the end result (perpetuates the cycle)

BEHAVIOR
the action itself

Our habits are the things that we already do—they feel "easy" to us because we've practiced the actions and reinforced the loop so many times.

The *trigger* is the stimulus that precedes the action, or that gets you to take some action.

The *behavior* is what you do—the action itself.

And the *reward*—also known as the *result*—is what you get out of the behavior, and why you keep doing it. This result can be *positive* or *negative*, but either way, it reinforces the cycle.

FOOD FREEDOM

Habit Loops

BREAKING A HABIT

If we want to break an old habit, it can help to write out the current loop. Since we typically engage in these habits without awareness, we need to first see what's happening more clearly.

First, we need to really explore the trigger of our habit, to see what it is specifically that precedes or leads to this behavior. There may be multiple triggers for the same habit, and triggers can be **external** (like a time of day) or **internal** (like feeling stressed). Try to get down to the deeper and most impactful triggers for you. Then, we can explore opportunities where we may be able to take a different action—an alternative behavior—that does *not* perpetuate the same habit loop.

And finally, it's **important to examine the result of the behavior honestly.** We often *think* we're getting something that we need from a long-time habit, like relief or pleasure. But we must see and acknowledge what we're *actually* getting from the behavior, like stress, pain, or shame. By seeing the result of the behavior more clearly—recognizing it's *not* as great or helpful as we believed—we give our brains important new data that makes it easier for us to leave old habits behind.

HABIT TO BREAK: *Going into the pantry at night and snacking mindlessly.*
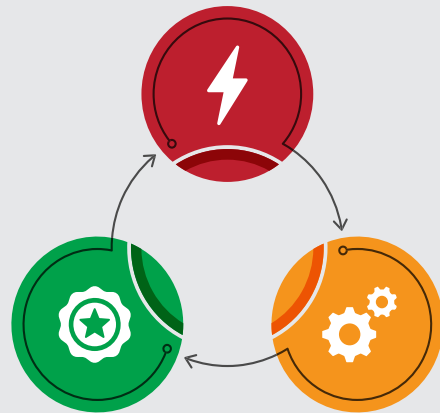
TRIGGER:
Evening time, hunger, stress about the next day.

BEHAVIOR:
Go into the pantry and snack to fill my "emotional" hunger.

RESULT:
Feel temporarily satisfied physically, although the emotional pain persists. The physical satiation distracts from the emotional discomfort.

>>> POSSIBLE MODES OF EXITING THE LOOP:

HOW TO CHANGE OR PREVENT TRIGGERS:
- *Eating more throughout the day, to ensure physiological satiety.*
- *Complete the stress cycle throughout the day by getting some movement in via exercise, a walk, yoga, or light stretching.*
- *Turn to healthier emotional coping mechanisms, such as art, therapy, mindful movement, meditation, journaling, social time with friends and loved ones, etc.*

ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIORS:
- *When the trigger hits, have a snack with intention by putting it on a plate or in a bowl to consume mindfully, while sitting down.*
- *When I feel a craving, breathe and tune in to my body, get curious about what the craving feels like and "ride out" the wave.*
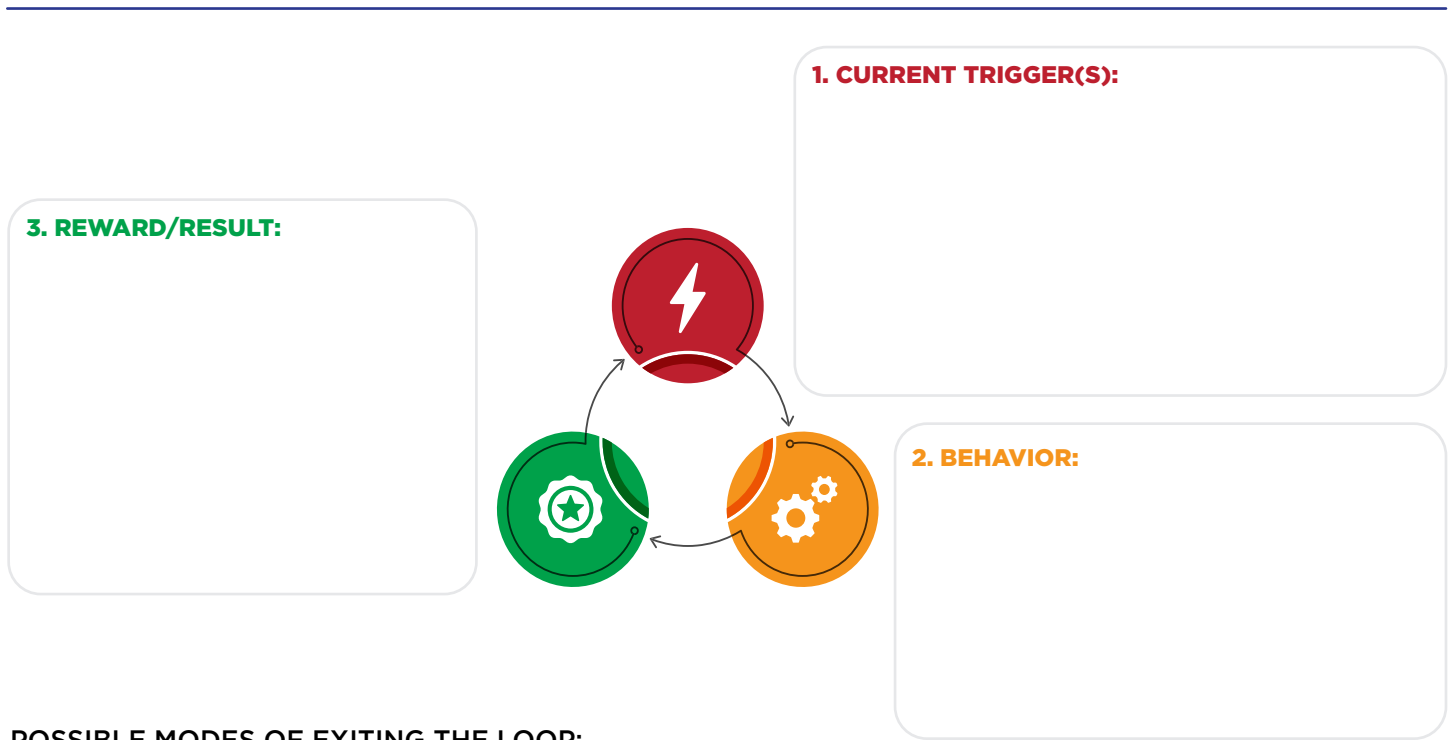
FOOD FREEDOM

Habit Loops

BREAKING A HABIT
>>> TRY IT OUT!

Try mapping out a habit loop of a current personal habit you'd like to change.

HABIT: _____

Why do you want to break this habit? _____

_____

1. CURRENT TRIGGER(S):

3. REWARD/RESULT:

2. BEHAVIOR:

POSSIBLE MODES OF EXITING THE LOOP:

How to change or prevent TRIGGERS:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Alternative BEHAVIORS:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Habit Loops

BUILDING A HABIT

To build a new habit, we can map out a habit loop that we want to practice, so we're clear on what our trigger, behavior, and reward will be! These should be chosen with intention and awareness: **Knowing *yourself* and your struggles, what would actually support you with this habit?** What triggers are most likely to work in your life and propel you to action? What kind of results or rewards will be genuinely rewarding for *you*?

Choosing a trigger/behavior/reward that works for someone else won't necessarily do anything for you. For this to be an effective tool, each of us must be willing to see ourselves clearly, without judgment, and recognize "this is where I struggle, and this is what works for me."

Keep in mind, the result/reward is about the **IMMEDIATE** here and now—not long term. With many habits, we do them for their long-term benefit, not because they necessarily do anything for us right this second. So, when mapping out habit loops, it's important that you build in an IMMEDIATE result/reward that will reinforce the loop and keep it going. If you want to build a meditation habit, you won't see immediate changes—so what kind of immediate reward can you build in after your meditation sessions to reinforce the habit loop?

The point is to ultimately have your mind start to associate this reward with the behavior, so when the trigger comes up and prompts the behavior, your brain is already excited for the reward to come after! Over time and with enough repetitions, the immediate rewards you started with are often no longer necessary to keep your habit going.

HABIT TO BUILD: *A daily mindfulness meditation practice*
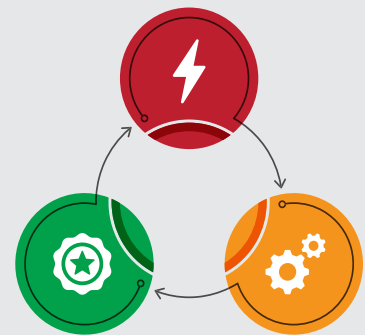
POSSIBLE TRIGGERS:
- Do it first thing when I wake up.
- Do it right before bed, after brushing my teeth.
- Set a daily alarm to do it at the same time.
- Do it before/after a meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner).
- Do it before/after I exercise.
- Call a friend every day at the same time and do it together. (Added accountability!)

BEHAVIOR:
- Meditate—for even 5 minutes (or 1 minute) per day!

POSSIBLE RESULT/REWARD (IMMEDIATE):
- Do it before my first cup of coffee, so the coffee can be the "reward" that will become associated with the behavior.
- Do it before my first meal, and associate breakfast as the delicious result.
- Do it before a small daily personal pleasure, such as listening to a podcast, exercising, reading a book, or sitting down to watch a TV show.
- Practice gratitude after each session, and notice how great it feels!

Habit Loops
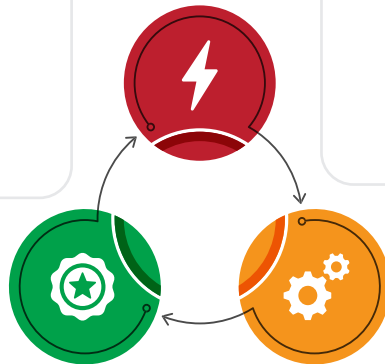
BUILDING A HABIT

>>> TRY IT OUT!

Try mapping out a habit loop of a personal habit you'd like to develop.

HABIT: _____

Why do you want to develop this habit? _____

_____

1. POSSIBLE TRIGGER(S):

2. BEHAVIOR:

3. REWARD/RESULT IDEAS: