

MODULE 1: GETTING STARTED | TRANSCRIPT

LESSON 2

Habits & Change

Make cooking a habit

Skills and know-how are only part of cooking. Making cooking a habit—a regular practice that with time is difficult to give up—is the other part.

So the question is, how do you make cooking a habit?

In *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg explains that there are three steps:

- (1) You receive a cue.
- (2) It triggers a behavior.
- (3) That behavior results in a reward.

We remember the reward, so it drives us to perform the behavior again when the cue arises. After enough repetition of a particular cycle, our brain can go on autopilot.

Dopamine, the brain's feel-good chemical, plays a big role here. Dopamine's responsible for desire, decision making, motivation, and memory creation. Whenever we do anything that the brain perceives as "good," it rewards us with a happy dopamine release, making us want to do that thing again and again. The more we perform this routine, the more dopamine releases and the more ingrained the cycle becomes. Voilà: a new habit is born. It's a genius system, really.

All of this means that an essential part of making cooking into a habit is actually enjoying it. And this means doing it the way that works for you.

We all know it's easy to get excited and inspired by a new goal (New Year's resolutions anyone?), but it's just as easy to get burned out if you overdo it. Why? Because you've killed your enjoyment. Willpower is a lot like a muscle. It gets tired with overuse and needs time to rebuild, and small changes are what will make it stronger.

To develop habits you need to take on change in manageable, enjoyable bites. So if, for you, learning to cook means researching recipes online for hours, creating a mile-long shopping list, spending an hour at the store, coming home and cooking for another hour, and cleaning for another, then you're going to burn out pretty quickly.

Change doesn't always happen overnight, but small steps can add up to big ones. During this course, pay attention to how you feel, what you learned, and open your mind to how you could adjust and adapt. Write about it in your cooking journal. When your changes begin to feel more routine than new, keep going and always remember how far you've come.

If you start to find yourself resisting the changes, or tired of cooking, that's a pretty good sign to back off a bit. We all have different thresholds, emotional roadblocks, and habits that can be changed. Just be honest and patient with yourself. Remember, nothing kills progress faster than perfectionism!

Here's a baby step to try: Start putting a pot on the stove when you come home from work. Leave a post-it note on the bathroom mirror or TV to remind you about the pot. If you end up ordering take out, that's fine, just put that pot on the stove every night. Progress is progress no matter how incremental. That pot will become the cue that triggers cooking, and the memorable, delicious meals you make will become the reward that reinforces the habit. Eventually, just setting that pot on the stove will start your mouth watering.

Making time to cook is about priorities. Could the time you spend on Instagram be used to prep veggies for the week? Is binge-watching that docuseries going to put good food in your mouth? Food enthusiast and author Michael Pollan says it best: “Over the past decade, we’ve somehow found two extra hours a day to be online, but we say we don’t have time to cook.” The sooner we’re honest about our priorities and time, the sooner we can reap the rewards for doing so.

Lesson Actions

Share with friends, family, or the course community one habit you’re committed to changing or building. This way, you’re held accountable. Consistently check in and share what you’ve learned with each other through the process. Make yourselves available to each other—a simple, quick text, or message of encouragement can work wonders.