HOW TO INCREASE YOUR WILLPOWER
From the book WILLPOWER by Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney

Willpower isn’t popular. Advertisers depend on buyers not having willpower, popular culture celebrates self indulgence (Mardi Gras), and many blame our personal troubles on external causes (poverty, environment, politics, others, genes) rather than lack of willpower. But the fact is, everyone benefits from increased willpower. Here’s how to increase it.

1. Pick one area to work on. Willpower, like money in a bank account, is limited so spend it wisely. Trying to make too many changes at once sets us up for failure. Where would you like more self control?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stop a bad habit</th>
<th>Save for retirement</th>
<th>Take a class</th>
<th>Stick with a project</th>
<th>Develop patience</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finish a project</td>
<td>Eat less</td>
<td>Finish a class</td>
<td>Say “no” to a desire</td>
<td>Stay calm in traffic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Live on a budget</td>
<td>Quit swearing</td>
<td>Control my temper</td>
<td>No procrastination</td>
<td>Follow through</td>
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<tr>
<td>Floss</td>
<td>Quit slouching</td>
<td>Be punctual</td>
<td>Make a decision</td>
<td>Drink less</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Overcome a fear</td>
<td>Waste less time</td>
<td>Quit sabotaging myself</td>
<td>Quit smoking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other?</td>
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2. Identify the things that drain willpower. Willpower is like a muscle and gets tire from:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of sleep</th>
<th>Expressing emotions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor diet, low blood sugar</td>
<td>Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Chronic pain, sickness, PMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercising willpower uses up willpower</td>
<td>Keeping secrets, wearing a “mask”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suppressing/ avoiding emotions</td>
<td>Intense focus and prolonged concentration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Controlling your thoughts, impulses</td>
<td>Conflicting goals</td>
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<td>Other?</td>
<td>Other?</td>
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3. Look for indications that your willpower reserves are low.

A. When it’s hard to overlook your partner’s, bosses’, or co-workers’ annoying habits.
B. When you have a change in your overall emotional intensity.
C. When you find yourself especially bothered by frustrating events.

4. To replenish low willpower eat protein, slow acting glucose boosters like peanuts, cashews, vegetables, raw fruit, cheese, fish, meat, olive oil, and whole grains. Fast acting glucose boosters (soda, white bread, potatoes, white rice, donuts, and candy) give us a quick spike in energy but then we crash.

5. Our failure to exercise willpower can be explained in part from the incredibly complex lives we lead. If we have 150 goals some will inevitably be in conflict with others and this drains us. Undone goals nag us on a psychic level. Solution: put your goals in writing and review them weekly. (See David Allen, Getting Things Done).

A. Set goals: vague five year plans, and more specific monthly goals.

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR WILLPOWER, book summary by Erik Johnson (erikjohnson1@comcast.net)
B. Do a mind dump— get all your “to dos” on paper so your subconscious isn’t fretting about them. Include your “next actions” for each to do.

C. Prioritize those goals and pick the top three to complete this week. If you finish only two, put the third at the top of next week’s list. No fudging on this. With practice you’ll eventually get into the habit of productivity.

6. Monitor yourself. Self awareness is vitally important to self control. This means keeping records in the areas you want to change. By monitoring ourselves we compare where we are in relation to where we think we should be. By paying attention to ourselves we gain greater control over ourselves.

7. Online tools help you monitor spending (mint.com), computer use (RescueTime.com), depression (Moodscope.com), jogging mileage (Nikeplus.com and Flotrack.com), and everything else like sleep, weight, moods, etc, (QuantifiedSelf.com, Lifehacker.com).

8. If you want to foster contentment: focus on how far you’ve come. If you want to foster motivation and ambition focus on the road ahead.

9. To get extra motivation for willpower, share your collected data with others. Public information has more impact than private information. People care more about what other people know about them than about what they know about themselves. Imagine the public scandal of yielding to your temptation. Publish your infractions on TWITTER, FACEBOOK, or COVENANT EYES. The fear of humiliation is typically greater than the pull of our vices so allow public shame to motivate virtue.

10. Willpower can be strengthened by starting slow. By changing a simple routine behavior such as slouching, swearing, or using your non-dominant hand for writing you’re rewiring your willpower muscles. These are good “warm up” exercises for bigger tasks ahead (like quitting smoking or sticking to a budget). If you can’t change that routine behavior all day long, just do it for a set period of time. By evening you’ll be too exhausted (from willpower depletion) to be consistent anyway.

11. It’s easy when not tempted to make grandiose plans to conquer all your bad habits. But then we get in the heat of the moment and we buckle. It’s easy to start a diet when you’re full, or commit to becoming more patient when we’re not angry. To increase success read on.

12. Make a pre-commitment. Sign a contract, take a vow, or lock yourself into a virtuous path. Make “buckling” unthinkable, repellant, and not even an option.

13. Arrange with your friends to make a painfully large donation to your favorite charity for every infraction. Or worse, arrange with your friends to make a painfully large donation to a charity you hate for every infraction!

14. Establish habits/routines. These give our brains a rest. We deplete little to no willpower when we engage in habits. This “conservation” of willpower energy is then stored up for when we need a burst of it for bigger goals.

15. Self forgetfulness. By distracting yourself from the onerous task of conquering a temptation it’s helpful to have a higher purpose— women in childbirth with focal points, marathoners with visions of the finish line, martyrs looking forward to heavenly rewards, or a mission to be as helpful to others as possible.
Lofty, transcendent thoughts, and sacred tasks about why we’re doing what we’re doing (rather than how we’re doing it) add to our store of energy.

16. To increase willpower over excess drinking, join AA. It works because it involves:

A. Goal setting: One day at a time.
B. Monitoring: Report successes and failures to group/sponsor.
C. Wear-housing: When you’re in a meeting you’re not drinking.
D. Social support: Sobriety earns acceptance and approval at an AA meeting.
E. Friendships: Lonely people are at greater risk for relapse.
F. Peer scrutiny: By telling your story you’re more likely to keep your resolutions.
G. Peer influence: We become like those we hang out with; therefore hang out with sober folks.
H. Higher power: Religious people are less likely to develop unhealthy habits; prayer is a kind of anaerobic workout for self control; being monitored by God (the Ultimate Sponsor!) is good motivation.
I. Reinforced values: We’re reminded of the payoff of long term sobriety vs. the cost of short term inebriation.
J. Clarity: Drinking in moderation is a fuzzy, hard to measure, and easy to gradually violate goal. ZERO drinking is a clear, easy to measure, and leaves no room for gradual slip ups.

17. To increase willpower over food please note: our bodies react to hunger on a biological level. When hungry our body thinks it’s going to starve and it fights back. We retain weight longer, shed pounds slower, and hang on to every fat cell we have.

A. Set realistic weight goals.
B. Set realistic daily consumption goals.
C. Monitor your daily consumption (keep a food diary).
D. If you overeat do not rationalize, “What the hell, I might as well binge eat and start again tomorrow.”
E. Learn to listen to your body’s internal appetite voice that says, “I’m full.” Do not depend on external clocks, scales, or dietary rules. Many people continue to eat after their body tells them to stop. Listen to your body. Going numb to your “I’m full” message will sabotage your success.
F. Ignore the inner voice that says, “I’m hungry.” Here’s where willpower comes in. Listening to the “I’m hungry” message will sabotage your success.
G. Remember: when you feel hungry you feel everything more intensely than usual. Longings for food will seem especially intense. But they’re just feelings. They’re not the boss of you; you’re the boss of them.
H. Resisting those feelings of hunger uses up willpower energy (glucose)... so replenish glucose with snacks consistent with your daily consumption goals.
I. Rid all cupboards (car, desk, garage, closet, suitcases, shelves, and all secret hiding places) of forbidden snacks.
J. Brush your teeth after dinner. Your greedy impulse for sugar is then pitted against your lazy impulse to have to brush your teeth again.
K. Join a monitoring (rewards and penalties) website: stickK.com or fatbet.com.
L. Find friends who share your weight loss goals. We’re more influenced by a friend who loses weight than a neighbor who loses weight.
M. Weigh yourself every day.
N. Learn about foods, calories, fats, carbohydrates, etc. so you can explain the nutritional difference between a donut and an eggplant.

O. In restaurants don’t let the servers remove chicken bones too early. The leftover bones remind you how many you’ve eaten.

P. Never say “Never” to certain foods (chocolate, ice cream, etc) because eating forbidden foods in moderation is easier to maintain than fighting the temptation to never eat them, blow it, and then binge on them.

Q. Make contingency plans so you know what to do in public without thinking.

A. If they serve chips I won’t eat any.
B. If there’s a buffet I’ll eat only vegetables or fish.
C. I will snack only at pre-approved times and with pre-approved foods during the day.
D. I will not eat between 7:00 PM and 5:00 AM.
E. I will not eat in front of the TV. Or, if I do, only pre-approved portions and foods.
F. If alcohol is served I’ll pay even more attention to my foods. Alcohol consumption makes us less aware of what we eat.

18. Set yourself up for success. Adopt a realistic list of temptations to avoid. The fewer inner conflicts we have the fewer opportunities we have to fail. Play offense, not defense. Arrange your life so you’ll avoid problem situations and not react to crises. Use self control to avoid crises, not get through them.

19. Balance short term gains with long term costs. We typically lose willpower when we forget the high cost of indulging.

20. Orderly surroundings (make your bed, clear your floor, and clean your desk) feed willpower. Messiness drains it.

21. Bad habits are strengthened by routine, so change your routines: don’t drive past the donut shop, don’t watch the same TV show in the same easy chair, go for a walk, take up a hobby, do sit ups rather than eat ice cream, don’t take the cigarette, chocolate, drinking break as usual. The best time to stop smoking is when you’re on vacation away from your smoking triggers.

22. Some vices can be postponed rather than eliminated cold turkey. Record that TV show and watch it later; eat ice cream only on weekends, etc. “I’ll have it later” is sometimes easier to live with than, “Waaaaa! I can’t have it at all!”

23. Try the Nothing Alternative. Set your watch to work on a task for one hour. If you don’t work on it during that hour DO NOTHING else. No emails, phone calls, web browsing, or anything else of interest. Boredom will drive you to your task!

24. Reward yourself for progress. When willpower is only used to deny us things it leaves a bad taste. Turn willpower into a force for fun, pleasure, reward.

25. Don’t look at laps of willpower as failure. When video gamers lose battles or make mistakes they don’t give up. They haven’t failed; they just haven’t succeeded yet. They keep playing for the rewards. Look at willpower the same way. It’s your ticket to rewards.