

Why habits make all the difference

Every day, we perform dozens of actions without even thinking about them. We lock the front door when leaving home, fasten our seatbelt as soon as we get into the car and look both ways before crossing the road. These are all examples of habits.

A habit is a learned behaviour that we have repeated so often in the same situation that it eventually becomes automatic. A specific context or trigger, such as getting into the car, prompts the behaviour without requiring much conscious thought or mental effort.

The impact of these habits is significant. They help protect our homes and belongings and keep us safe when we have to brake suddenly or cross a busy street. The good news is that we can build the same kind of habits in our digital lives.

Why are habits so powerful?

Every day, we make hundreds or even thousands of small decisions. That takes mental effort. Habits help reduce that burden. Instead of making the same decision over and over again, we simply act.

Many digital security habits take only a few seconds. Locking your screen before leaving your desk, installing an update as soon as it becomes available or switching on your VPN before connecting to public Wi-Fi are all small actions that can quickly become part of your daily routine.

Behaviour or habit?

Not every secure behaviour is a habit.

Some security actions are only performed occasionally, such as changing the default password on a new device. Others are perfectly suited to becoming habits because they are repeated regularly in response to the same trigger.

It is these small, everyday habits that are at the heart of the Small habits. Big impact. campaign. The campaign builds on last year's [Be mindful. Stay safe.](#), which encouraged us to pause and think before we act online.

How do you build a new habit?

There is no magic number of days after which a behaviour automatically becomes a habit. Research shows that this varies from person to person and from one habit to another. What we do know is that repetition in a consistent context is the key to building lasting habits.

Here are a few simple tips to get started:

- **Start small:** Don't try to build ten new habits at once. Choose one habit and practise it until it becomes second nature.
- **Link the habit to a specific trigger:** New habits are much easier to maintain when they are linked to something you already do. For example: You stand up from your desk → you lock your screen.
- **Use visual reminders:** A simple reminder can help reinforce a new habit. Think of a sticker on your laptop or a reminder on your smartphone. Over time, you'll need these reminders less and less as the behaviour gradually becomes automatic.

Learn more

- [Does it really take 66 days to form a habit? We asked the expert, Dr Pippa Lally, | University of Surrey.](#)

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