



Lose Weight Without Dieting

Harnessing the power of psychology & habits for life-long health & weight control

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I started dieting at age 11....

Barriers to Healthy Eating

- ❖ **Time:** “I would eat healthy, but I’m way too busy to cook.”
- ❖ **Money:** “Fruits and vegetables are way too expensive for my family.”
- ❖ **Energy:** “I’m just so tired at the end of the day, I can only get takeout.”
- ❖ **Preferences:** “I hate vegetables, so I can’t eat healthy.”
- ❖ **Self-talk:** “I just don’t have the discipline, McDonald’s is too good.”
- ❖ **Social:** “Everyone at work goes out for pizza, so I have to go too.”
- ❖ **Family:** “I like eating healthy, but my husband and kids hate it.”

Health is an issue of psychology,
not nutrition.

Eat less + exercise more = weigh less

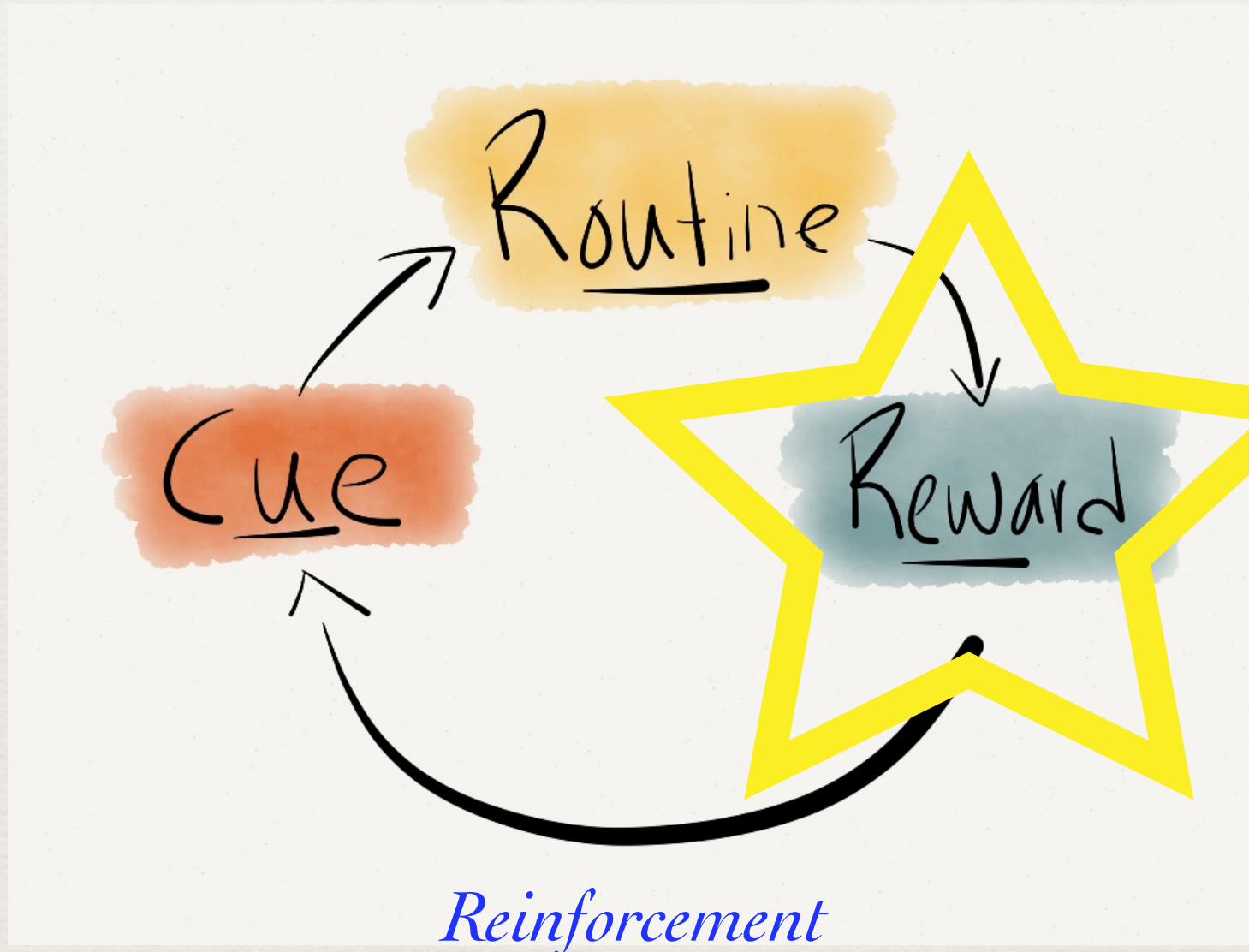
Diets Don't Work for Long-Term Weight Control

- ❖ In 75% of long-term studies dieting predicts weight gain. (*Lowe et al., 2013*)
- ❖ Biological drop in basal metabolic rate to adjust to new body size. (*Prentice et al., 1991*)

Habits: The Diet Antidote

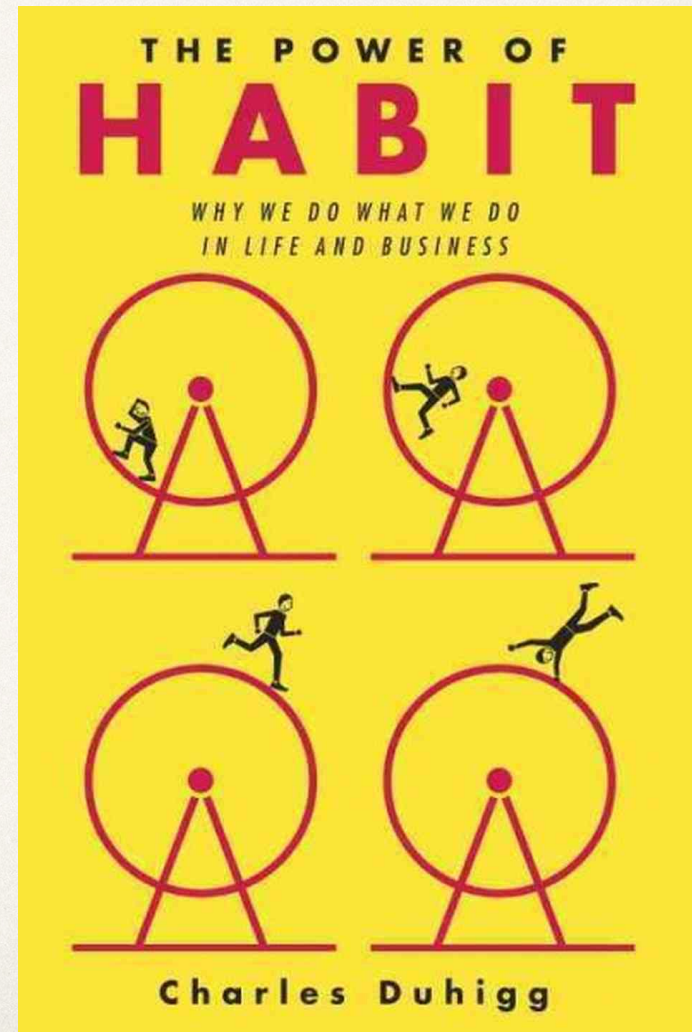
- ❖ 90% of food choices are habit based
- ❖ Once formed, habits occur automatically, without willpower
- ❖ Habits are lasting, and good habits are as hard to break as bad ones
- ❖ Habits evoke the 80/20 principle, making occasional health deviations relatively harmless

The Habit Loop



The Golden Rule of Habit Change

- ❖ Same trigger
- ❖ Same reward
- ❖ New action
- ❖ Repeat 2 weeks - 6 months



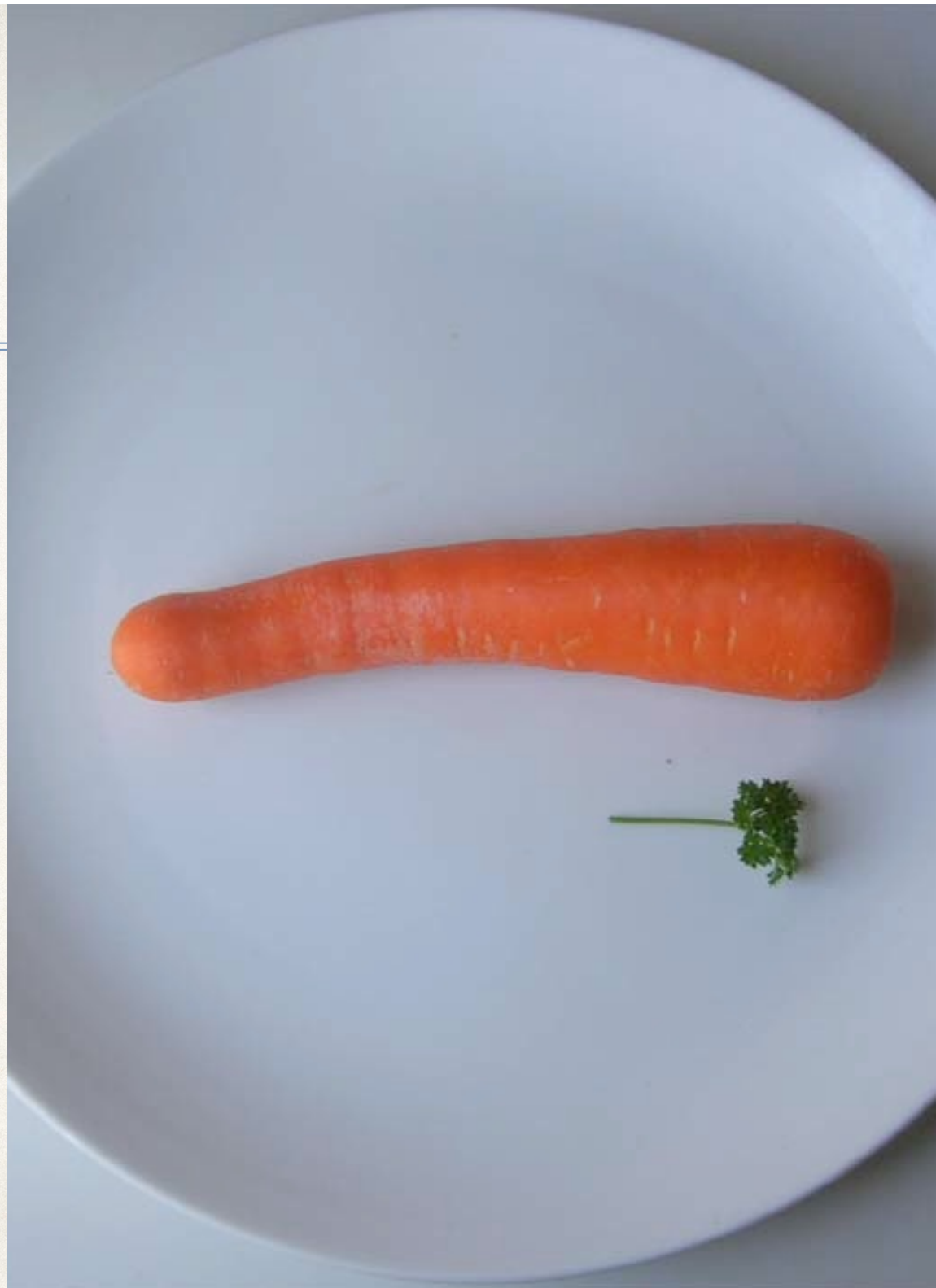
Rewards

- ❖ Must be directly associated with the action
- ❖ Must be immediate, not distant
- ❖ Must be positive, not neutral
- ❖ Can be very subtle



Rewards

- ❖ Eating “healthy”
- ❖ Lower disease risk
- ❖ Be a “healthy size”



Habit Rewards & Motivators

- ❖ **Physical pleasure:** taste, texture, smell (adrenaline, dopamine, serotonin)
- ❖ **Psychological pleasure:** socializing, giving, collaborating (serotonin)
- ❖ **Increased efficiency:** faster, easier, simpler



Triggers

- ❖ Mental reminder to initiate task
- ❖ Can be cognitive or environmental
- ❖ Must be part of normal routine
- ❖ Best if trigger immediately follows an existing habit



Set Clear Habit Goals

- ❖ Goals should target specific behaviors (habits), not ultimate outcome (e.g. weight).
- ❖ Choose high impact habits (e.g. eat breakfast)
- ❖ Most effective goals are black & white. “Yes, I ate oatmeal for breakfast today.”
- ❖ Effective goals are easy to measure and track.



Habit Goals → Actions

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| * Eat breakfast | * → yogurt with muesli |
| * Exercise daily | * → walk 10,000 steps |
| * Eat mindfully | * → one mindful meal |
| * Eat more vegetables | * → eat something green |
| * Cook at home | * → cook dinner 3x/week |

Re-scripting Habits Solves Real Problems

- ❖ Best use of limited willpower
- ❖ Identify Home Court Habits for greatest impact
- ❖ Personalized, adaptable
- ❖ Makes life awesome

Home Court Habits

- ❖ Eat breakfast
- ❖ Cook real food
- ❖ Eat vegetables daily
- ❖ 10,000 steps per day
- ❖ Strength training
- ❖ Monitoring (weight, steps, food journal, etc.)
- ❖ Mindfulness



Monitoring

- ❖ Self-monitoring of food intake, exercise and body weight are all associated with **increased weight control** (*Burke et al, 2011*)
- ❖ Better technology (accuracy) and more consistent monitoring is associated with **better compliance**.
- ❖ Monitoring creates **accountability**, helps **identify barriers**, and demonstrates progress (**psychological reward**)

Mindfulness

- ❖ Paying attention to a single thing in the **present moment** without judgement or action
- ❖ You can attend to **physical experience** (e.g. breath) or **mental experience** (e.g. thoughts or emotions)
- ❖ Practice **accepting reality** in the present moment, resisting the urge to judge it
- ❖ **Mindfulness is a practice**, there is no goal. But benefits do emerge.

Mindful Eating

- ❖ Directing attention to food properties results in **greater enjoyment** of all foods (*Wansink, 2005*)
- ❖ Directing attention to satiety helps **curb overeating** (*Wansink et al., 2006*)
- ❖ **Less impulsive**, more value-based indulgences (*Hendrickson & Rasmussen, 2013*)
- ❖ **86% of mindful-based interventions help** with obesity-related eating behaviors (*O'Reilly et al., 2014*)

Mindful Eating Habits

- ❖ Chew (really)
- ❖ Put down fork
- ❖ Remove distractions
- ❖ Use a plate
- ❖ Sit at a table



Free 5-day Mindful Eating Course

mindfulmealchallenge.com

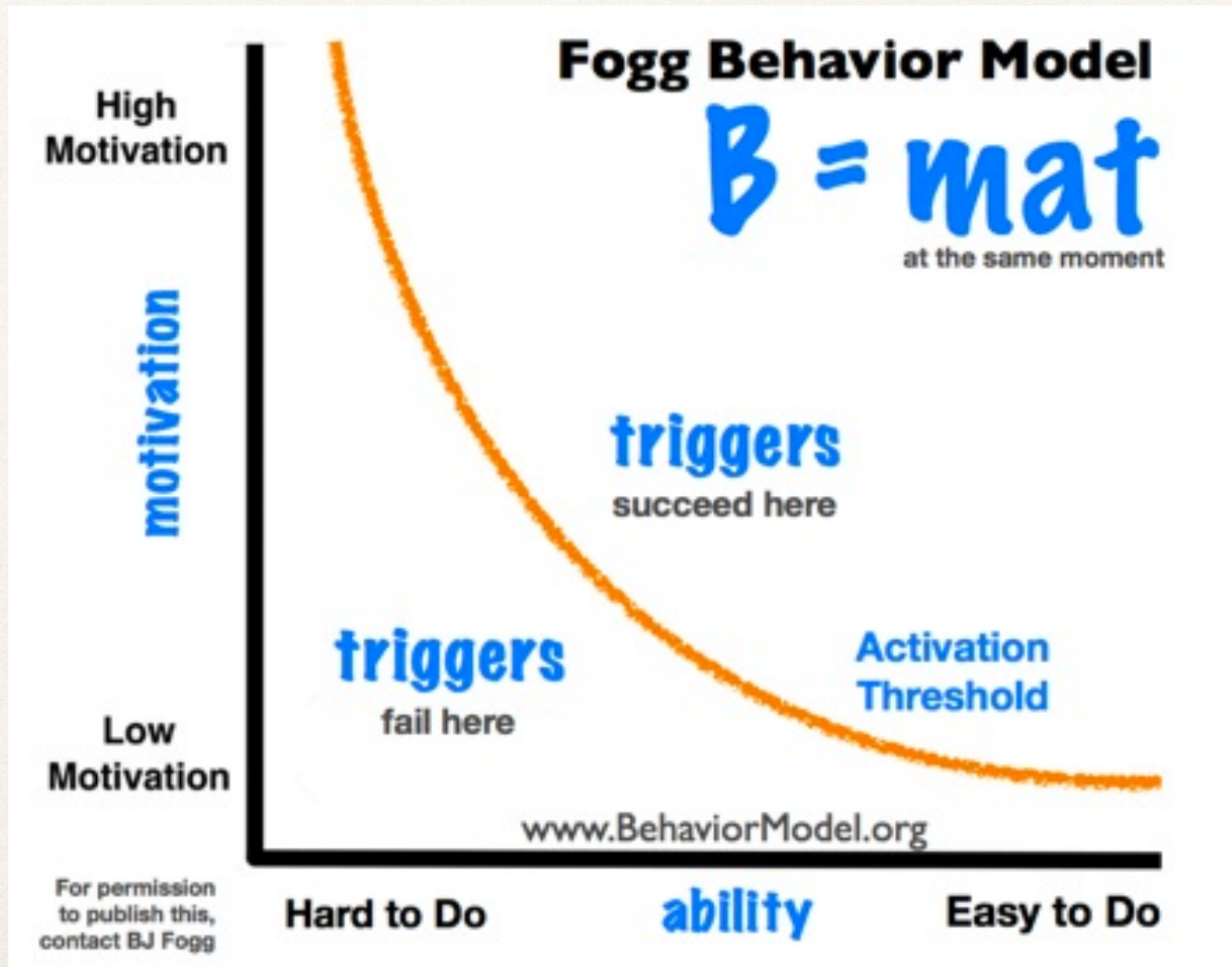
mindful
MEAL CHALLENGE



Urge Surfing: Mindfulness through cravings

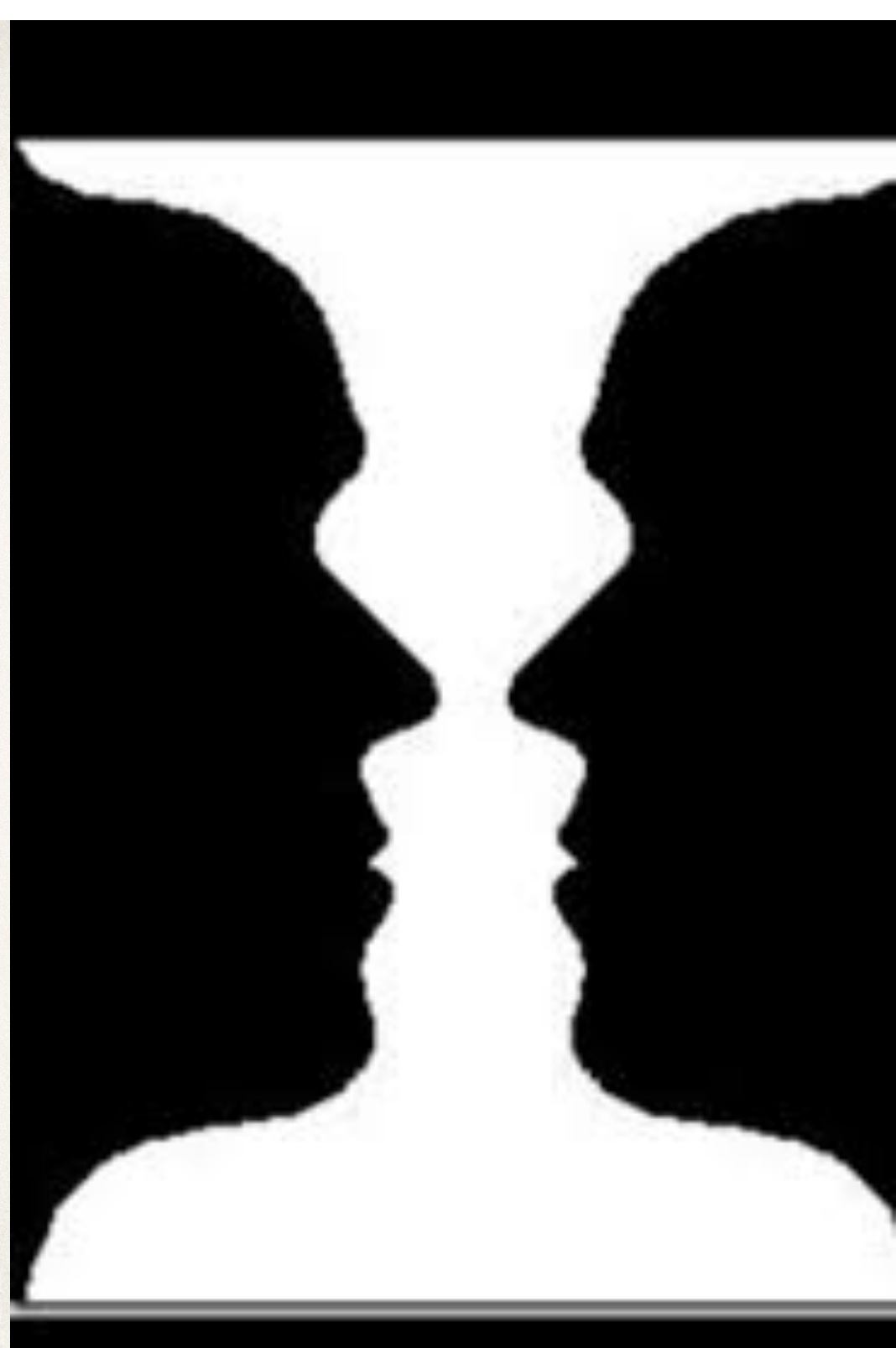
- ❖ **Mindfulness of your physical and mental state** while experiencing a craving
- ❖ **Don't try to suppress or ignore** what you feel, just observe impassively
- ❖ Cravings are finite, typically not lasting more than **30 min**
- ❖ **Mentally “surf” through** the buildup, crest and fall of the craving

BJ Fogg's Behavior Model



Cognitive Illusions & Limiting Beliefs

- ❖ *Perceived* difficulty vs *perceived* reward
- ❖ Create conditions to lower perceived difficulty
- ❖ Create conditions to increase perceived magnitude of reward
- ❖ Triggers are key to initiating action, regardless of motivation



Better vs Perfect

- ❖ Ideals and perfectionism preempt positive action
- ❖ For habits, **rewards scale up with time and difficulty scales down**
- ❖ Starting small with a “**tiny habit**” is better than not starting at all
- ❖ **Consistency** is more important than intensity



The Convenience Illusion

- ❖ Habits shrink perceived time of task
- ❖ The Oddball Effect: Novel tasks expand perceived time
- ❖ Habits + oddballs make new habit formation seem harder than it really is
- ❖ **Willpower required to form new habits**



Language: The Framing Effect

- ❖ We perceive experiences differently **depending on how they are described**
- ❖ **“We taste what we expect to taste,”** Brian Wansink (*Marketing Nutrition*)
- ❖ **90% of people** have negative associations with the word “healthy”
- ❖ **Health Halo:** Experience of foods described as “healthy” *taste worse*, and are *less satisfying* (fewer calories)

Reframing

- ❖ **Never use the word “healthy”** to describe food. Use “tasty” or “easy” instead.
- ❖ **Seasoning with words:** Use descriptive language to evoke nostalgia, geographical location, cooking methods, or vivid sensory images (e.g. “ripe & juicy,” “handmade,” “Cajun style,” “farm fresh,” etc.).
- ❖ **Don’t lecture, judge or nag.**



Limiting Beliefs

- ❖ Irrational belief about your ability or identity that prevents you from taking positive action
- ❖ “I’m a terrible cook.”
- ❖ “I hate running on the *dreadmill*”
- ❖ “I’m big-boned.”
- ❖ **Change your story, change your behavior**



The Power of Stories: Special

- ❖ People enjoy eating food that is special.
- ❖ Tell stories about farmers, ingredients, recipes, etc.
- ❖ Increases perceived reward.



The Power of Stories: Success

- ❖ Success stories decrease perceived difficulty
- ❖ Stories are motivating and empowering
- ❖ E.g. Weight loss, learning to cook, learning to enjoy vegetables, getting friends and family to eat healthier.



The Power of Stories: Values

- ❖ Value-based motivations more effective than health-based
- ❖ “Food & Society” class acquired better eating habits than students in Health class (*Hekler et al., 2010*)
- ❖ Reframe unhealthy behaviors as “not me” or “not worth it”
- ❖ Shift time / money / effort priorities



Don't Diet. Instead Use Willpower to...

- ❖ **Rescript habits:** Identify triggers and rewards, script new actions
- ❖ Set clear goals and **monitor yourself** for compliance and effectiveness
- ❖ **Practice mindfulness**
- ❖ **Identify and break limiting beliefs** that make healthy behavior seem harder than it really is
- ❖ **Use words and stories to reframe healthy behaviors** as fun and enjoyable, and unhealthy ones as gross, unethical or not worth it
- ❖ Learn about social, environmental and economic **values around food**

Thank you.

Recommended Reading

- ❖ *Foodist*, by Darya Rose
- ❖ *Mindless Eating and Marketing Nutrition*, by Brian Wansink
- ❖ *The Willpower Instinct*, by Kelly McGonigal
- ❖ *Stick*, by Dan and Chip Heath
- ❖ *Willpower*, by Roy Baumeister and John Tierney
- ❖ *The Power of Habit*, by Charles Duhigg
- ❖ *Mindset*, by Carol Dweck