

Be strong: Believe in it Keep the momentum going Work around obstacles Stay focused

Simply telling yourself that your tenacity is limitless makes it so. “Our research shows that if people believe their willpower is unending, they can continue to exert similar degrees of self-control on successive occasions,” explains Krishna Savani, Ph.D., an assistant professor at the National University of Singapore Business School. “For example, just because they say no to fries with dinner doesn’t mean they’re less likely to say no to cake for dessert too.” Even by reading this story, you’re on your way to changing your mind-set. “We found that presenting people with a one-page article saying that willpower is unlimited changed their behavior,” Savani says. Also helpful: thinking back to times you were able to exercise self-control all day (you stuck to your workout schedule and your diet) or for longer periods of time (you completed every long run during your entire marathon-training cycle).



While willpower doesn’t get used up throughout the day, “current research suggests that certain types of challenging tasks may require more willpower than others,” Lurquin says. The things you find most draining depend on your own skills, values, and personality. To determine what taxes you most, pay close attention to the times your willpower fails. When it does, take note of what you were trying to do, what you were up to just before that, and the time of day, and look for themes. For instance, if you skip your workout only when you’ve scheduled a morning session, your willpower may naturally be lower in the a.m. Once you’re aware of your triggers, you can better plan around them: On days you can exercise in the morning only, do yoga or strength training at home, so you don’t have to force yourself to get up, get dressed, and drive to the gym.

Changing the way you think about your goal can rev your self-control. “Some studies suggest failures of self-control happen when people shift from focusing on ‘have to’ goals to ‘want to’ goals,” Xu says. In other words, your self-control slips away only when the task feels less than essential. For instance, if your doctor says you need to lose weight, you’re going to stick to your diet because it’s vital to your health. But once your numbers are in the good-for-you zone, you may be more likely to cave in and eat a cupcake. In situations like this, reconnecting to the value behind your goal—i.e., why you’re doing it—can help you uncover hidden stores of willpower. “If we remind ourselves how important it is to reach a goal, we’ll put more effort into it,” Lurquin says. Before you start something new, be clear on why it matters to you—that will keep your willpower strong and steady.

After finally meeting a crazy deadline at work or crushing a HIIT class that you were intimidated to try, Savani says, make that voice in your head tell you, “I’m on a roll!” It may feel forced at first. But research he just presented at the annual meeting for the Society for Personality and Social Psychology found that people in cultures that believe exerting willpower is energizing are better able to sustain self-control than those who consider it tiring. When you get home from the gym, harness the momentum you’ve created to continue doing good-for-you tasks like straightening up the house or packing a healthy lunch for tomorrow. This will help reinforce the idea that one act of willpower feeds into the next.

live healthy

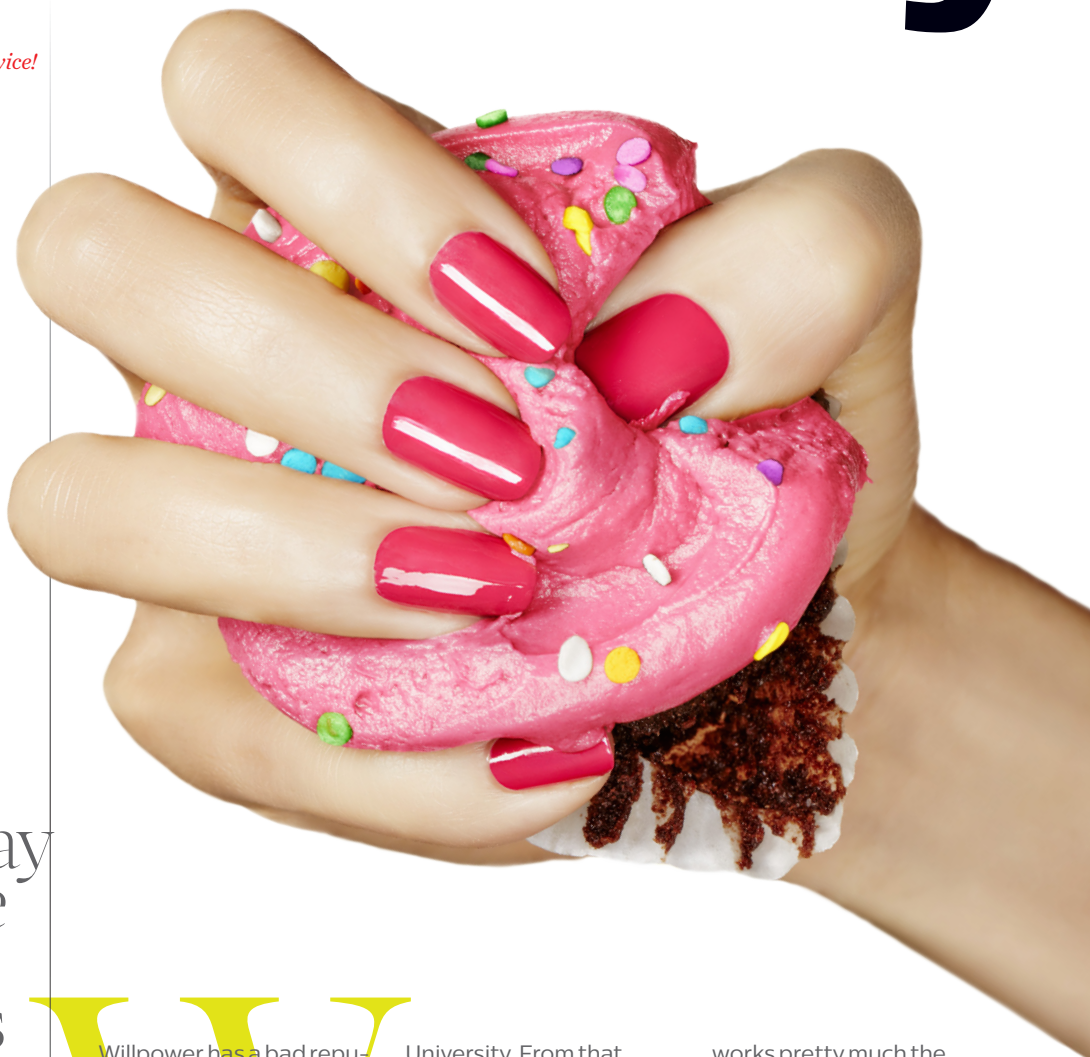


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You've got the power

No matter what's tempting you to go offtrack, you can stay the course and get the results you want. Science has discovered that we all have a secret stash of self-control. Here's how to tap yours.

By SARA ANGLE



Willpower has a bad reputation. It's known for being fleeting and hard to summon up. And we've bought into it, convinced that our stock is precious and limited. But it's not true, according to new research. Recent studies show that our willpower is in fact strong, boundless, and ready whenever we need it. Excellent news!

"Years ago, several landmark studies showed that willpower could be depleted over time," says Xiaomeng Xu, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychology at Idaho State

University. From that, experts believed that willpower was like a muscle: The more you used it over the course of a day, the more tired it became. But it turns out that theory was wrong. Newer studies suggest that in many cases, willpower may stay strong no matter how often you use it in a day.

Willpower is actually a tool that you can pull out whenever you need it. And while some projects demand more of it—pushing through a half marathon as opposed to jogging a few miles, say—it

works pretty much the same way every time, as long as you know how to wield it properly.

Willpower is the force behind virtually every goal you strive for, so this finding could have major implications for your health. "If you have greater amounts of willpower, you're healthier and less stressed," says John Lurquin, a researcher at the University of Colorado Boulder. Luckily, harnessing its full power is just a matter of changing the way you think about it. These four key strategies will help you do just that. →