



magic minutes

Got a spare 120 seconds? **Carmel Sparke** investigates whether that's all you need to start a good habit.

Quick confession: I've been fibbing to my physio for years. When he asks about my knee exercises, and I say, "Oh, I try to do them most days...", I'm lying through my unflossed teeth.

That's because, as with flossing, a simple habit like doing a few squats and stretches in front of Netflix is easy to say but hard to do. Between those good intentions in the physio's rooms and back at home, something happens, and couch nearly always

wins over yoga mat. I'll manage a few of the exercises but, unfortunately, never the promised amount.

And it's why the "two-minute rule" described by US habits guru James Clear in his book *Atomic Habits* appeals. He suggests that when adopting a new habit, try scaling it back to an action that takes no longer than two minutes. Doing this makes those first steps as easy as possible, and gives you a chance to head down a more productive path.

Under the two-minute rule, a promise to read every night is pared down to "I'll just read one page." Rather than meditating for 20 minutes, you opt for one minute. Instead of running five kilometres, your new two-minute version is "I'll tie my running shoes."

Or in my case, put on stretchy leggings and unroll a yoga mat.

"I think something like the two-minute rule is fabulous for starting a new habit," says Melbourne psychologist Dr Jo Mitchell. "The idea of making it really manageable in size and getting you going in the first place is fantastic.

"It's a way for you to find out, is this a habit that I really want to invest in? I can try it out for two minutes a day."

A strategy like the two-minute rule ticks a lot of boxes in helping overcome some of the barriers to making change. Trying to do too much too soon – and giving up as it all becomes too hard – is a common hurdle.

"For most of us, incremental change is going to be what works best rather than big sweeping changes," Mitchell says. "For the majority of people, the best way is to think, 'What is the smallest unit of change that I can implement and then how can I build on that?'"

Another challenge is that we're hard-wired, as an ancient survival mechanism, to conserve energy. "Shifting into action is mentally hard, more than anything else, because our bodies are urging us to conserve energy," Mitchell says. "Something like the two-minute rule works to beat that and get ourselves into movement. Once we're in motion, we're likely to stay there."

Between those good intentions in the physio's rooms and back at home, something happens, and couch nearly always wins over yoga mat.

If you're worried that you'll see right through it as a trick, try thinking of it as an experiment, says Mitchell. "Be curious about what might happen if you were to invest two minutes in this behaviour you want to change," she suggests. "Seeing it like that, rather than as tricking yourself, is probably a little more conducive to creating a shift or change."

There's more to starting a new habit than just giving it two minutes a day, but Mitchell says committing to this tiny amount of time is one way of getting us to the start line.

It sets up the ritual that may progress to a habit we can continue to build on – taking that walk, making that meal, doing those exercises.

For me, focusing on just one small action helped me take that initial step of not sitting on the couch. I found I could keep going for a bit and was rewarded by feeling pretty pleased for having ticked off a few exercises.

After a fortnight, I reckoned I was a six out of 10 – no fibbing required.

Now, if I could just do the same with my flossing and the dentist. •



MY DAY ON A PLATE

Karishma Kasabia
35, *Khòlò* designer
and founder

9.30am Breakfast today is three pieces of toast. One with avocado, one with peanut butter and the last one with melted gouda and fresh chilli. I accompany it with masala chai. I meditate afterwards and watch an episode of *Riverdale* on Netflix (don't ask).

1pm I walk to work and scoff down half a papaya, because penance.

3pm I've got *poha*, which is a flattened rice, potato and vegies combo. I have grapes with me but opt for a latte and half an almond croissant instead.

7.30pm After photos come in from our recent shoot, I am finally home and make masala scrambled eggs with leaves and mushrooms.

8pm Work restarts once our little one is in bed. Phone calls to India and emails until 11pm. Then lights off.

Dr Joanna McMillan says...

Top marks for... Getting your dinner. Eggs are often thought of as a breakfast food, yet they are perfect for quick, easy meals at any time. Your combo of eggs teamed with spices and vegies gives you a fabulous mix of nutrients and protective phytochemicals. You also allow several hours after the meal before bed. This ensures you have a good overnight fast, giving your digestive system a break.

If you keep eating like this you'll... Have to ensure you eat enough of a variety of fibre types to fuel a healthy gut microbiome. You don't mention what type of bread you ate, but *poha* is usually white rice and neither it nor the croissant has much fibre.

Why don't you try... Ensuring you buy wholegrain bread and making *poha* with a wholegrain red or brown rice. Include legumes three times a week – dhal is perfect or add lentils or beans to rice dishes.

Khòlò will run an Haute Couture Beading class at The Windsor Workshop on August 31. Tickets on sale at: the-windsor-workshop.com/whats-on/haute-couture-beading-kholo