



“Forgotten memories can have psychological effects in the absence of active repression.”

David Rettew, M.D.

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Changepower

Secrets to habit change
by Meg Selig



Meg Selig is the author of *Changepower! 37 Secrets to Habit Change Success.* [more...](#)

Want to Be Happier? It's as Easy as 2, 5, 11, 15, 20, 43

Mastering the lessons of 6 lucky numbers can benefit your mind and body.

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Is it getting harder to fit all your health goals, work tasks, and personal pleasures into one day? When life feels overwhelming, just rely on your lucky numbers! No, I'm not inviting you to play in a "numbers racket." The following numbers are "lucky" because they help you accomplish a worthwhile goal in minutes. These numbers are based on research findings and expert advice, not chance or a "wheel of fortune." They work! Here they are:

Lucky Number: 2

David Allen, author of *Getting Things Done*, suggests that if a task you need to complete will take two minutes or less, just do it now! This "Two-Minute Rule" will keep small, onerous tasks from clogging your to-do list.

Lucky Number: 5

When you're frustrated with a difficult project at work or home, use the "Five-Minute Rule." To stop procrastinating and get yourself going, tell yourself: "I will just work for five minutes on this project. Then, if I want, I can stop." To use this rule to cultivate persistence, tell yourself, "I'll just keep at this project for five minutes more. Then, if I want, I'll stop." You may decide to keep going, but even if you don't, you'll be five minutes closer to *done*. This wonderful idea comes from MJ Ryan, author of *This Year I Will*.

Lucky Number: 11

If you dislike exercise but still want to live longer, what is the *least* amount of brisk walking or moderate exercise you can do each day and still get a longevity benefit? The answer, based on extensive research by epidemiologist I-Min Lee of Harvard Medical School, is 11 minutes. People who exercised for 11 minutes per day added 1.8 years to their life, compared with non-exercisers. It's good to know you can reap the benefits of exercise with just a little effort. (How many daily minutes of exercise give you the *greatest* longevity benefit? See below.)

Lucky Number: 15

Are you tempted to pick up a third drink despite a vow of moderation? Are you yearning for a second helping of that devilish chocolate dessert? Is

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your craving for a cigarette almost too much to bear? If you've ever had intense cravings, just remember the number 15. According to research on cravings, most cravings last a surprisingly brief amount of time—about 15 minutes. Relapse specialist Alan Marlatt describes cravings as waves—they build to a peak, then slowly break up. But you can learn to "surf" them without giving in. And knowing that your cravings will dissolve within 15 minutes is so reassuring—most of us can live with 15 minutes of discomfort on our way to achieving a valued goal.

Lucky Number: 20

You are trying hard to solve a problem, but the answer eludes you. So stop. Really! Relax. Take a break, up to 20 minutes long, and do something totally different—walk, nap, knit, or talk to a friend. When you return to the task, a miracle will have occurred: The answer was there all along! If you do crosswords, you already know the "aha moments" you can experience even after a short break. Why are such breaks so helpful? When you deliberately break out of your work pattern, your brain releases chemicals that counter the stress response. This brain change helps you relax and shift into a different, more creative mode of thinking—and then the answer "magically" appears. This phenomenon was termed "the breakout principle" by researchers Herbert Benson and William Proctor.

Lucky Number: 43

Ready to power up your exercise program from the minimum 11 minutes? Curious how many minutes of daily moderate exercise you need in order to reap the *maximum* numbers of extra years of life? The answer is 43 minutes per day. That could increase your life span by 4.2 years. (After 43 minutes, the longevity benefit is negligible.) Or, if you prefer, exercise for 22 minutes a day and add 3.4 years to your life. (Learn more [here](#).)

2, 5, 11, 15, 20, 43. To increase your odds for good health, productivity—and sanity—bet on these lucky numbers.

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Sources:

- "The breakout principle." Wehrenberg, M. *The 10 Best-Ever Depression Management Techniques*. (WW Norton, 2010), p. 102.
- "Two-minute rule." Allen, D. *Getting Things Done*.
- "Five-minute rule." Ryan, MJ. *This Year I will...*

Meg Selig is the author of *Changepower! 37 Secrets to Habit Change Success* (Routledge, 2009), on sale [here](#) and [here](#). Follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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