



## Healthy & Resilient You

# Reinvent Yourself This Fall

### How to Harness Back-to-School Energy as an Adult



Ah, the back-to-school season! The smell of fresh planners in the air, the squeak of spotless sneakers in the halls, the new hairstyle, the new wardrobe, the new...fifteen-year-old you?

OK, let's not go that far, but if summer's end has you nostalgic for your youth, there's good news: kids aren't the only ones who can take advantage of back-to-school energy to kickstart personal reinvention. Adults can too, no permission slip required.

It all comes down to tapping into the "fresh start" effect.

#### Now Is the Time

According to behavioral scientists—and, no surprise, Hallmark—major holidays like New Year's, milestone dates like a 40th birthday, and seasonal shifts aren't just any old days of the week. They serve as temporal landmarks that give form to our lives. Our brains use them as mental bookmarks, separating the pages of our old selves from our new ones. With each new chapter comes the opportunity for growth.

Fresh starts put emotional distance between us and our past, mentally preparing us to embody the person we want to be.



We're 48% more likely to pursue new goals after a fresh start.



Fresh start thinking comes with a dopamine release for added motivation.

There's really no hard-and-fast rule for what counts as a temporal landmark. If you're considering learning a new hobby or improving your interpersonal skills, you can cheat a bit and tell yourself anytime—like fall, spring, or Wednesday—is the exact right time to do it.

That said, there's a difference (and some distance) between thinking about a fresh start and following through with it. A growth mindset can help bridge the gap.

#### Setting Goals with a Growth Mindset

Change isn't always easy. The road to success can be long and unpredictable, and sometimes the dopamine rush can fizzle out due to frustration. If the fresh start effect is like a car's ignition, [a growth mindset is a steady grip on the wheel](#), keeping you moving in the right direction.

### A growth mindset:

- Recognizes that effort wins over innate talent.
- Accepts feedback constructively.
- Is process-oriented.

People with this outlook see challenges as learning opportunities and find it easier to stay motivated despite setbacks. Your old self might have had a fixed mindset, but this new person you're about to become probably has a growth mindset, right? Right!

## This Fall, Start Small

Fresh start: check. Growth mindset: check. Now it's time for action. Personal growth doesn't need to be radical, but it does need to be intentional. These techniques can help you make micro changes with long-lasting effects on your daily life.



**Make it a Mantra** – Mantras, or repetitive inspirational phrases, have a profound impact on the mind ([especially when paired with other simple mindfulness exercises](#)). You don't need a guru to write one. If you want to start waking up earlier this fall, tell yourself, "I'm the kind of person who wakes up early and enjoys it" over and over again. Your brain will take that as a cue to nudge you to become that person you tell yourself you already are.



**Shake Up Your Self** – According to the "multiple selves" theory in psychology—and Walt Whitman, who wrote that we "contain multitudes"—we don't have just one fixed identity. If change feels uncomfortable, this idea can help you find a version of yourself who welcomes it. Try writing a short bio of a future you: someone with a trait you admire, like confidence, calm, or spontaneity. Then, spend a week acting like that version of you. You might be surprised how natural it starts to feel.



**Practice the Other 5-Second Rule** – Ever freeze before speaking up in a meeting or setting a boundary with someone? When something feels hard or uncomfortable, our brains often stall. Here's a simple workaround: Count backwards from five and then... just do the thing. It helps interrupt overthinking and kickstart action. (And for the record: the original 5-second rule about eating food that's fallen on the floor doesn't hold up, no matter how fast you count.)



**Quit Something You're Good At** – Stop overcommitting to things you're competent at but don't really like. Think overediting your work or leading that book club. Let someone else do the heavy lifting once in a while to free up your day to focus on the areas you want to improve.



**Fail Forward** – Just because you've failed at something doesn't make you a failure. [Reframe setbacks as a necessary part of success](#). You burned dessert. So what? Now you know how long not to leave the cookies in before next week's bake sale.

The best part about harnessing back-to-school energy? You don't need to re-enroll in high school to make a fresh start. And you don't have to squeeze all your growth into one season, either. Change is a lifelong process—messy, meaningful, and always evolving. But if you're looking for a place to begin, this is a pretty good one.



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