



Ignore This and You Will Eventually Fail

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Have you noticed how the thought of changing what you eat, or adopting any new behavior, can cause anxiety and tension? This is because you may not believe in your ability to do it. Your belief in your ability to do something is called self-efficacy. There are two differences between self-efficacy and self-confidence. First, you can be *confident* in your belief that you are going to fail. But self-efficacy only refers to the belief you will succeed. Second, there is no general self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is specific to the goal you are trying to achieve.

Self-efficacy provides the foundation to motivate you to make positive changes in your life and to persist when you are struggling. People with low self-efficacy view difficult tasks as threats they should avoid, instead of challenges to pursue. When setbacks occur, they give up quickly, as they lack a sense of commitment.

To achieve goals requiring behavior change, it is critical to believe in your ability to succeed. The higher your self-efficacy in a certain area the more difficult the goals you will set, the more effort you will expend, and the longer you will persist.

There are five ways to improve your healthy eating self-efficacy. The first is with mastery experiences (repeated positive experiences). Your confidence improves every time you succeed by eating a food on your eating plan, allowing you to set and accomplish larger and larger goals. The other four ways to improve self-efficacy are by (1) watching others perform the action successfully, (2) someone you trust, or in a position of authority, telling you that you can do it, (3) telling yourself you can do it (self-talk), and (4) imagining yourself doing the task successfully (mental imagery).

Studies indicate those with a stronger **belief** in their ability to adopt healthy eating habits are much more likely to actually eat healthier foods. You may notice self-efficacy isn't described in the Hidden Laws of Habit Change. This is because all the ways to improve self-efficacy are already incorporated into the Hidden Laws.

- Mastery experiences: Consistent Repetition
- Watching others perform the action successfully: Identity (watching and emulating a role model)
- Having someone you trust, or in a position of authority, tell you that you can do it: Support
- Telling yourself you can do it: Think, **Say**, Write (using self-talk, mantras, and affirmations)
- Imagining yourself doing the task successfully (mental imagery): Imagine It

If eating healthier sounds easy, then you likely have high self-efficacy in this area from positive past experiences. If this sounds overwhelming, then you likely have low self-efficacy in this area and may need to start with less challenging goals. There is a popular saying, "if you believe it, you can

achieve it.” This isn’t always true, but the essence of that statement is important to understand. **You probably won’t achieve something without believing in your ability to do it. And the stronger you believe, the more likely it is you will succeed.** This is the power of self-efficacy. I go into much more detail on these topics in my book, *Eat Like an Expert*. Download the [Hidden Laws of Habit Change](#).