

**THE
WEIGHT'S**

OVER

TAKE

BACK

CONTROL



**Ditch dieting,
transform
your mindset
and change
your life**

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Award-winning creator of the  **slimpod** programme

CHAPTER 19

Unlock the Power of Anchors

In my years of helping people achieve sustainable weight loss, one concept has stood out as both incredibly powerful and often overlooked: the science and psychology of anchors. Anchors are stimuli that create unconscious habits, shaping our behaviours in ways we often don't realise.

Understanding and harnessing this power can be a game changer. Anchors are like invisible strings that tie certain stimuli to automatic responses. They can be anything from a specific smell to a particular time of day, and they trigger behaviours without us even being aware of it.

This concept is rooted in classical conditioning, a type of learning discovered by Ivan Pavlov in the early twentieth century. Pavlov found that dogs could be trained to salivate at the sound of a bell if the sound was repeatedly paired with the presentation of food.¹ This basic principle extends far beyond dogs and bells. Human brains are constantly forming associations between different stimuli and responses. For example, if you always snack while watching TV, your brain starts to link the two activities. Eventually, just sitting down in front of the TV can make you crave a snack, even if you're not hungry. This is an anchor at work.

UNLOCK THE POWER OF ANCHORS

The power of anchors lies in their ability to create unconscious habits. These are behaviours that are performed automatically because they have been repeated in a consistent context.² This means that if you can identify and change the anchors in your life, you can significantly alter your habits and, consequently, your weight.

Imagine you have a habit of eating biscuits every afternoon. This habit likely started with an anchor – perhaps the time of day or a particular feeling of boredom or stress. Each time you ate a biscuit in response to this anchor, the connection in your brain grew stronger. Over time, the anchor and the behaviour became so tightly linked that you now find yourself reaching for biscuits without even thinking about it. Breaking this cycle involves identifying the anchor and replacing the associated behaviour with a healthier one.

For instance, if 3 p.m. is your usual biscuit time, you could plan to have a cup of herbal tea instead. By consistently pairing 3 p.m. with tea rather than biscuits, you'll gradually weaken the old anchor and strengthen a new, healthier one.

This process is supported by the brain's ability to reorganise itself by forming new neural connections – the concept of neuroplasticity that we've already explored.³ This means that no matter how ingrained your current habits are, you have the power to change them.

Anchors don't just apply to eating habits, of course. They can influence all sorts of behaviours that impact your weight. For example, if you tend to skip workouts because you associate exercise with discomfort or failure, you can create new anchors that make exercise a positive experience. Start by setting a consistent time for your workouts and pair them with

something you enjoy, like listening to your favourite music or exercising with a friend. Over time, these positive associations will make it easier to stick with your fitness routine.

Another fascinating aspect of anchors is their ability to affect our emotional responses. This is particularly relevant for emotional eaters who turn to food for comfort. A study found that people often eat in response to negative emotions because food provides a temporary distraction and sense of pleasure.⁴ By recognising the emotional anchors that trigger your eating, you can start to address the underlying issues and find healthier ways to cope. For instance, if stress at work leads you to binge on junk food, identify that stress as your anchor. Then, develop alternative responses that don't involve eating. This might include taking a short walk, practising deep breathing exercises or even just stepping away from your desk for a few minutes. The key is to create a new, positive behaviour that you can consistently turn to when you feel stressed.

It's also worth noting that not all anchors are negative. You can intentionally create positive anchors to support your weight-loss goals – for example, placing your running shoes by the door as a visual reminder to exercise or keeping a water bottle on your desk to encourage hydration. These small changes can make a big difference by constantly nudging you towards healthier choices.

In my experience, the most successful weight-loss journeys are those that embrace the power of anchors. By reshaping the associations in your brain, you can transform your habits and create a healthier, happier life. It's about working with your brain's natural tendencies rather than against them, and, with patience and persistence, you can achieve your goals.

UNLOCK THE POWER OF ANCHORS

By understanding and leveraging the power of anchors, you can make meaningful and lasting changes to your habits. This knowledge equips you to navigate your weight-loss journey with greater awareness and control, ultimately leading to a healthier and more fulfilling life.

Remember, this is not about perfection, but about making gradual, consistent changes that lead to lasting results.

How You Can Take Back Control

Swap negative anchors

Start by pinpointing the triggers for your unhealthy habits. If you always reach for a snack at a set time, swap sweet stuff for a healthier option. By consistently pairing the same time with a better choice, you'll reprogramme your brain to crave the healthier option.

Pair exercise with enjoyment

Make workouts a positive experience by linking them with something you love. Set a consistent workout time. Do something you enjoy at the end, like sitting in a park or having a skinny latte, because this creates positive associations.

Create visual reminders


Use visual cues to constantly nudge you towards healthy behaviours. Place your running shorts and top by the bed at night so you see them when you wake up. Save a selfie of yourself out jogging as your phone's wallpaper.

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