Concept

Fresh start effect

Dates that mark a beginning, such as a Monday, a new month or a new year, encourage us to start what we had been putting off.



In Spanish
Efecto nuevo comienzo

Origin
Dai, Milkman and Riis (2014)

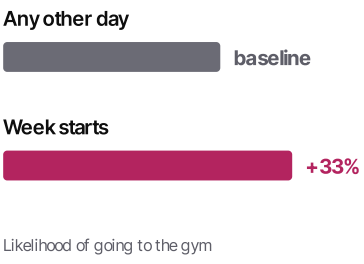
What problem it addresses

It explains at what moments people are most likely to start a habit or a change.

An example

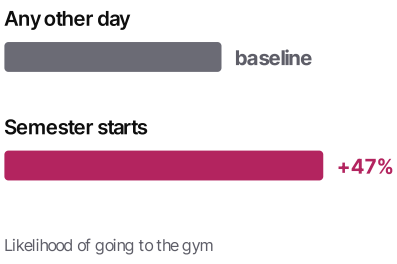
Gym visits by students at a university were analyzed over several months.

At the start of the week



The likelihood of going rises **by 33%.**

At the start of the semester



The likelihood of going rises **by 47%.**

It also rose at the start of the month and the year. Start dates work like a blank page.

Why it happens

1

Start dates separate a before and an after.

2

We feel our failures stayed in the previous period.

3

And they make us look at our lives from a distance, so deciding on a change feels easier.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Suggest starting at a natural beginning: Monday, the new month, a birthday or a new stage of life.

Avoid

Using "new year" pressure to sell what won't be used.

Don't fall for it

If you are going to wait until Monday to start, take the first step today.

+82%

What the research says

Rise in Google searches for "diet" at the start of the year. At the start of the month, they rose 3.7% (Dai, Milkman and Riis, 2014).

●●● **Solid evidence.** These are data on real behavior, not from the lab.

Connections

Used in

- Behavioral design

Related to

- Goal-gradient effect
- Present bias

Authors and works

2014	**Hengchen Dai, Katherine Milkman and Jason Riis**	Named it and measured it with searches, gym visits and personal commitments.

Sources

Original sources

- Dai, H., Milkman, K. L., & Riis, J. (2014). The fresh start effect: Temporal landmarks motivate aspirational behavior. Management Science, 60(10), 2563–2582. View source (https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2014.1901)

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.