

Break Those Bad Habits

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We might not like to admit it, but most of us have at least one bad habit that we'd like to change. It might be something that poses a serious health risk such as smoking, something that causes us stress such as out-of-control spending, or something that's just plain irksome, like knuckle-cracking or nail-biting.

A habit is any action that we have performed so often that it becomes almost an involuntary response. Aristotle taught, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." Since this is the beginning of a new year, it's the perfect time to look at replacing those bad habits with healthy new ones.

If you are ready to make some changes, here are some suggestions:

Awareness.

Since you perform habits automatically or without thinking, you first have to bring them into your consciousness before you can change them. What is the habit exactly? How is this habit affecting you and others? What need does it fill?

Motivation.

You must decide that breaking your bad habit is important and worth the effort involved. Then you must decide how you will replace it with new behaviours that fulfill the need. For example, giving up television might mean you need to find a new way to relax, socialize, or get information.

Commitment.

You must be determined to do whatever it takes so that you can get better control of your life. Write down your reasons for making a change and what you are now committed to doing – this action creates clarity by defining in specific terms what your change means, and it keeps you committed since it is harder to dismiss a promise printed in front of you.

It is important to focus on changing just one habit at a time. You must take consistent daily action for 30 days in order to build a new habit. If you do backslide, don't label yourself as having failed. Get out your list of reasons for changing and begin again. Ask for support from friends and family.

Rewards.

If you are sticking to your new behaviours then you deserve a reward. Just make sure that if, for example, you are on a health-related diet that the reward doesn't interfere with your challenge. This could be watching your favorite TV show or going to see your friends. Don't reward yourself after a week or a month, but as soon as you've taken the first few steps.

Perseverance.

There will be times when you question whether it is all worth it. Keep reminding yourself that you are moving closer to your goal. Talk to yourself throughout the day about how you are going to avoid triggers that can get you off track.

Have fun!

Changing your life for the better should be fun. Remember, you are making changes that will allow you more time, joy, and fulfillment in the future.