

# Habit Smasher

Breaking Bad Habits Before They Break You

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## Introduction

In 1903, the *American Journal of Psychology* defined a “habit” as “...a more or less fixed way of thinking, willing, or feeling acquired through previous repetition of a mental experience.” In other words, it’s something we do because we’ve always done it.

Some habits are ingrained in us deliberately for good reasons. For example, brushing your teeth after every meal, and looking both ways when crossing the street are both good ideas that keep you healthy and safe. They are things you don’t dwell on much. You do them without any real thought.

Not all habits are healthy. But by extension, they’re not all bad either. However, the ones that threaten good health or interfere



with life need to be “unlearned.” The good news is, it’s possible to do just that. You can learn to break the pattern of your habit. Though be warned that it takes a little time

and a certain amount of effort. You can’t expect change to happen overnight.

In these pages, we will look at some of the properties of habits, both good and bad. We’ll determine which ones are unhealthy and which ones need to be altered or changed.

We’ll also take a look at ways to break the bad habits, along with some tried and true methods. We’ll also explain why they work.

If you’re like most people, you’ve already tried to break a bad habit or two and found yourself sliding back into the same old behavior patterns. You may have even given up hope, and begun defining yourself by your habits,

e.g., “I am a smoker” or “I am a shopaholic.”

The fact is, you can break habits. And in almost every case, when you look at the success stories, the successful habit-breaker has stopped self-identifying with their habit.

Now it's your turn. Read on. It's time to change your life.

## How *Bad* Are Bad Habits?



Depending on the habit, the effects can vary widely. Smoking, for example, has been known to cause emphysema, cancer and can also be fatal. Less dramatically, but still affecting health and well-being, habits can create:

- Low self-esteem, low self-respect, and a poor self-image
- Impaired physical health, sometimes to extreme levels
- Substantial weight fluctuation
- Lethargy
- Insomnia or irregular sleep patterns
- Social anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Depression
- Impaired judgment

Our habits start in childhood when the temporary soothing feeling of sucking a thumb or holding a blanket provides relief from fear or stress. When we grow older, these habits are not so much “grown out of” but change to something more “adult.” A cigarette may take the place of the thumb and food may replace the security blanket.

But habits also develop in adulthood. That is often a response to being overwhelmed with responsibility, severe loss, or other strongly felt events. So while bad habits have deleterious or *negative* effects, they usually manifest in the long-term. In the meantime, you're enjoying the short-term payoffs that make you forget the bad entirely.

Most often, the bad habits we fall into as adults have the same reasons behind them as the ones we have as children. That is, they become a temporary surcease from fear or stress or pain. Often when the situation around us feels

out of control, we reach for something we *can* control, such as food or drink or smoking.

Not all bad habits are about physical manifestations. There are other bad habits which, while they don't cause physical harm, do cause other kinds of harm, perhaps professional or psychological harm. Like being consistently late to work or getting involved in unhealthy relationships.

Here are some examples of bad habits which can severely inhibit or prevent growth and a healthier, happier you.

- **Procrastination.** When you get into a habit of putting off important things, of delaying your work or personal life you'll start seeing the effects pretty quickly. Procrastination can lead to a loss of career opportunities, a loss of personal growth and deeper relationships. Procrastination on a car repair, for example, can lead to a repair five times the cost of a timely one.

- **Obsessive Compulsive Behavior.** Even when habits start off as good ones, dwelling on them



can become “bad.” If your habit is to wash dishes after every meal, can you leave them to sit for a few hours to go out? Will you sit through the party or movie obsessing over them, because you don't “feel” right until they are clean? Only you know when

something that started out as a good habit has “crossed the line.” Whenever a habit starts to affect your life negatively, it’s generally gone too far. When you see that start happening, it’s time to ease off.

- **Negative Voices.** Have you ever “heard” that little voice in the back of your mind telling you all the ways you failed? How about all the bad things that have happened and will continue to happen? Bad habits strengthen that little negative



voice. We become what we believe we are. If you think you're going to fail, you will naturally fail. Getting into a spiral of self-doubt and then self-recrimination is made worse when that too becomes a habit.

So, let’s look at some of those bad habits? While the previous list looked at the pretty big picture items, here are some that are more common. A few of these may surprise you.

#### 1. **Snacking**

You’re working on a project, and you have a bowl of chips next to you. You’re in the theatre and have the jumbo popcorn you’re chewing on while on screen the building blows up and the hero attempts that impossible leap into the air. What you’re doing is creating a habit of ignoring your body’s hunger/sated cycle. In effect, you’re training yourself to be unaware of your body’s needs.

This scenario can easily lead to obesity. Because when you get to a point where can no longer tell what’s enough, you’ll never feel quite full. Over time obesity becomes more than a problem of having clothes that never quite fit. The next thing you know you’re wandering down the path toward diabetes, gout, and a host of other health issues.

#### 2. **Smart-Phones**

Honestly, how much time do you stare into that small screen? How many-colored cubes blow up when you match them side by side? How often do you check your Facebook or Twitter feed?

Cell phones are a wonderful invention that keeps us “plugged in.” But making a habit of checking the phone first before doing anything else sends a clear message as to where your priorities lie. Constantly checking your phone can cause sleep problems, increased stress, and even poor posture which leads to a host of other health problems.

#### 3. **Nail-Biting**



Another calming sensation, rather like thumb-sucking as a child, nail biting is so common that 30-40% of the population does it. It’s also extremely unhealthy. Think about where

your hands have been today. Have you changed a diaper? Had to pick up after a dog? Needed to clean out a nasty sink?

Yes, you washed your hands, but did you get up under the nail with soap and water? Probably not. That nail bed is a germ reserve of everything you’ve touched right there, just under the overhang of your nails. Nail biting takes those germs and introduces them into the mouth and stomach and makes you ill. But more than that, nail-biting also can destroy your fingernails and can harm your teeth.

#### 4. **Stress-Shopping**



You’ve likely heard someone, somewhere saying that they were stressed and went out to buy new shoes or a DVD or *something* to make them feel better, at least for a while. That is the very definition of an instant, temporary response to stress or fear.

The downside to this is the obvious one, where unless you have a lot more cash flow than the rest of the world around you, you risk running up huge debt. And for what? The rush of acquisition is fleeting, but the cause of the stress is not. When the relief wears off, it’s back to



spend more and try to get another temporary surge of relief.

This habit can plunge you into serious debt, ruin your credit and lead to worse financial issues later on. It can take you years to recover from the repercussions. What's more, it leads to the problem of closets stuffed to the gills with things you never give so much as a second look. In turn, this then leads to the stress of having too much clutter. Bringing you right back into needing something to give you relief from all that stress.

It's a pretty vicious cycle, isn't it?

#### 5. Skipping meals



The opposite of snacking, skipping meals is another way to train yourself to ignore your body's natural hunger/sated rhythms. Skipping meals affects your blood sugar when things negatively affect your mood. You become that person no one wants to be around. That is not conducive to a healthy work or home environment.

Skipping meals also affect your metabolism, your hormone balance, and your immune system, resulting in an increased chance of getting sick.

Some of these items are not "bad" in themselves but become bad *when they become habits*. What's more, the effects they have on the body, on relationships, and on your career are amplified when it becomes a habit.

Breaking from such habits becomes a matter of survival. It can mean the difference between growth and stagnation, between being able to excel in your career and being forever staying in place.

## Breaking Bad Habits Will Change Your Life

We've taken a look at the dangers bad habits can create. Some can be life-threatening, some can be personally and professionally limiting. Chances are you've heard this before, or a version of it. But take a moment or two and try to imagine what your life would be like, when and if you were able to overcome these bad habits.

This list isn't simply the negative effects spelled backward or the reverse of the downsides already mentioned. It's a surprising group that lists an item considered a bad habit, alongside a list of benefits you wouldn't normally expect to see when you quit.

For example:

- **Smoking.** We all know by now that smoking can cause cancer and emphysema and a host of other illnesses. And getting out of that habit will lessen your chances for these ills. But you might not know

a surprising side effect of quitting smoking: Improved memory.

A recent research project at Northumbria University indicates that smoking can cause a loss of up to 1/3 of short-term memory. The people chosen to take part in the experiment had severe short-term memory gaps, which they found restored after they quit.

- **Sugar.** You've heard about Type 2 diabetes, weight gain, heart problems, and liver problems all connected to too much sugar and processed foods. What you might not know is that breaking the sugar habit can make you smarter.



UCLA studied the effect of high-fructose diets on rats and found the rats given high-fructose corn syrup were unable to find their way out of a maze they had successfully navigated several times before. Tests showed that the more sugars they consumed, the less able they were to get through the test.

The same principles involved in that test are involved in the human consumption of soda and other high-fructose syrup diets. The good news? Removing the sugars will restore that memory loss and get you back on track. Who knew?

- **TV.** Yes, being a couch potato means you exercise less, and you're at greater risk for illness and disease associated with poor diet

and lack of exercise. But did you know that it was killing you?

According to the University of Queensland, for excessive television watchers your lifespan can be reduced by 22 minutes for every hour you spend in front of the TV. For a true couch potato, that can add up quickly.

- **Sweets.** Like the high-fructose listed above, sweets can increase the risk of diabetes and other related health problems. But there is something else that you can blame on your sweet tooth: wrinkles.



The three most significant causes of wrinkles are too much exposure to the sun, smoking, and sweets. The high sugars in treats cause something called glycation. The result of glycation is a loss of elasticity of the collagen in the skin. In effect, it hardens it, leading to a ridged surface and thus wrinkles. Cutting the sweets out of your diet will lessen your risk of diabetes and other health issues and also keep you looking younger, longer.

- **Negativity.** Walking around under your dark cloud can lead to depression, poor self-image, and self-destructive behavior. But there is another indicated effect from a constant stream of negativity, and that's dementia.

Chicago's Rush University Medical Center has determined that those

people who create themselves a black cloud and travel under it are more likely to have dementia. However, through a positive outlook, using coping techniques and sometimes even seeking counseling, that risk is dramatically reduced.

- **Alcohol.** Cirrhosis and other physical effects of alcohol are well documented and the consequences repeatable. However, the lesser impact of what drink does to your wallet is still highly significant.

Estimates show that the average American spends \$100 each month on spirits, Australians spend \$18,000 each year, and the British spend a whopping £ 58,000 through their lifetime. Imagine how much money you'd save if cut that drinking habit.

- **Junk food.** Despite the obvious health benefits of avoiding "junk foods," chances are you'll be happier if you do. The Public Health Journal found that people who indulge in regular junk food regimen are 51% more likely to have problems with depression.

- **Lack of sleep.** Lack of sleep makes you drowsy, irritable and interferes with your ability to concentrate. Did you know that exhaustion negatively affects your weight too?

The University of Washington found a link between getting less than seven hours of sleep per night and higher body weight. The good news? The more you sleep over seven hours, the less effect sleep has on body weight.

- **Social media.** It's probably no surprise that the less time spent on social media, the greater the impact on your career. But it might not be the connection you're thinking. It's not about being buried in your phone and too busy to do the work.



CareerBuilder.com polled employers across the country and found that 37% of them chose *not* to hire a candidate based wholly on the candidate's social media presence. Their Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest accounts gave off a poor image.

There are many reasons to break bad habits, but there may also be benefits you didn't know. Who doesn't love hidden benefits to shaking bad habits? And imagine, the more bad habits you break, those advantages will go on and on.

## Breaking Bad Habits



The problems with bad habits are well-documented, and the benefits of being free of them are obvious. There are even some unexpected benefits of leaving them behind. So

how do you get started?

There's been a lot of talk about how to break bad habits. With so much information it can get a little daunting. What can you do to break free of the trap?

1. **Try Willpower.** There is a term used in psychology called "ego deflation." What this refers to is there is a certain set amount of willpower each of us has. Willpower requires energy and the more we use, the less we have.



If you fill your days with stress, you're using energy to deal with that. Again, if you fill your days with worry and constant pressure, your energies are going to be used up dealing with them, and you'll have little left for anything else.

The same applies when you try to take too big of a bite of food. Think about it – if you're chewing too much, it's easy to choke, and you honestly don't feel all that well after you swallow. Now apply that to stress. When you work on more than a single problem at a time, you're depleting the energy reserves you have and will run out of them twice as quickly. When that happens, you won't be able to fight either one. And you certainly aren't going to be feeling too well. The answer? Start small. Begin with little goals, especially at first. When you concentrate on small easy to measure accomplishments, you'll gain energy when you see your successes.

2. **Take a 30-day challenge.** For the next 30 days, you are going to change one habit. That's all, just one. That may not sound like a heavy challenge, but you might find that you don't have enough time to make the change. If it turns out you need more time to work on that habit, don't despair, you must take the time necessary. You've spent years getting this habit, allow yourself a little time

to get rid of it again.

So, for the next 30 days (or longer), concentrate and spend your focus on the one item you've chosen to complete. There may be more you want to work on, but don't. Concentrate the energy you have on this one. Pick something reasonable, measurable and rational. Thirty days won't be long enough to completely recover from the habit of smoking, even if you never have another puff. The *habit* will still be there. On the other hand, choosing to not smoke for 30 days is measurable and achievable. If that's your goal give yourself extra time to accomplish your goal and be sure to give yourself a well-deserved pat on the back when you get there.

3. **Set a start date.** Starting "right now" gives you no time to prepare yourself and get yourself ready for a big change. Habits we've had for a long time become comforts, friends even, even if they are trying to kill us. Setting a start date gives you time to say goodbye, to let go of the feelings of "missing out" on the sort of activity that gives you pleasure or comfort.

Then set a date and stick to it. Do you want to change? Start in the morning, start next week, but *start* it. No excuses, no delays. Once you've set the date, that's it. Start when you said you would and then be sure to follow through with the rest of the plan.

4. **Make it measurable.** If your goal is to "eat healthier," how will you know when you have met that goal? Is having a bowl of cottage cheese instead of a sugar-laden cereal healthier? Yes. Does having one bowl means you've achieved your goal? Probably not.

To have a realistic goal, you need to know when you've reached it. Set a *measurable*, realistic goal that says you've accomplished what you set out to do. Why do you want to eat healthier? Is your cholesterol high? Then set the goal for healthy cholesterol, set a number. That's your goal, and that's how you know you're there.

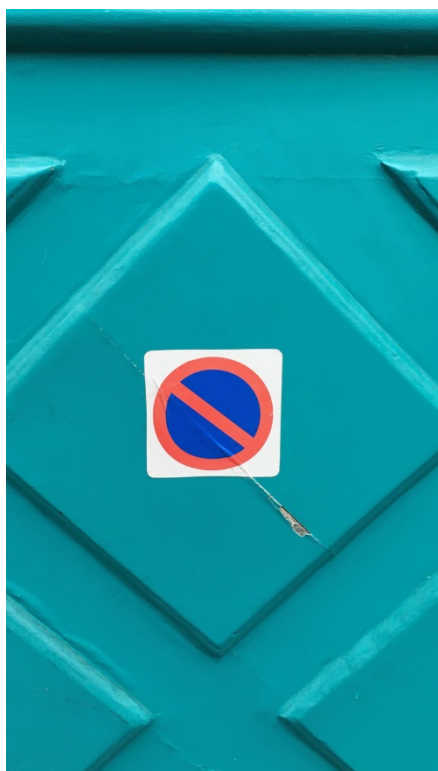
Is the reason you want to quit smoking the rising cost of cigarettes? That's measurable. Ask yourself how much did you spend this month? How much would you like to spend?

Do you want to lose weight? How much? That too is a



measurable, though keep in mind that HEALTHY weight loss should be about 2 pounds a week, so don't give yourself a goal that's going to hurt yourself in process. Be reasonable in your expectations and give allowance for the occasional plateau.

5. **Cold Turkey** is something for after Thanksgiving. Yes, we all



know someone that set down a final cigarette and never picked up another. It happens. It's not common. For every one that goes "cold turkey," hundreds fall back into old routines because they have no strategy in place to keep themselves from reverting to the same spiral of bad habits.

Think about the mindset of cold turkey. Imagine yourself putting down that last cigarette and never smoking again. That suggests an all-or-nothing mindset. So if you miss and have one cigarette you've failed. It's over. You can't do it, so what's the point?

The fact is, you *are* going to fail. It's how humans work. We fail, we learn, we try again. It's normal, healthy and natural. Going cold turkey often means that at the first sign of imperfection, we give up. Whereas, tapering off is often the best and most consistent way to quit.

6. **Where are you right now?**

When you're looking to improve yourself, you first need to know you're starting point. Then you'll understand where you need to be heading. Saying you want to lose weight is nebulous if you don't know how much you weigh. Smoking less means knowing how much you smoke now.

Establishing a baseline is another way to measure your success. If you want to lose 20 pounds, what will that new number be? If you're going to cut down on your drinking, what does that mean about the number of drinks per day? How many per week? What do you want that number to be?

7. **Baby Steps.** Maybe for you, cold turkey is for the birds. Most people do better by taking things one step at a time. These are changes that are done in baby steps, meaning taking just one small step at a time. These are the steps that usually last.

Going on a crash diet might help you lose a couple of pounds before the wedding, but it won't keep the weight off when you get home. For that, you need to change your habits, and that is done only over time and in small increments. Instead of the normal (baseline) way of eating, adding a piece of cake for dessert, adding a half a

piece (measurable) will cut the calories from desserts in half. It won't make a difference to the calories from the main entree, but it's a (measurable) step in the right direction. A half-slice every other day, then once every third, one per week... these are the changes that last, the ones that take. Why does this work?

If you suddenly have no cake at all, your body is going to have a fit. You've trained it to expect a certain amount of sugar at such and such a time. Easing off in baby steps retrains your body to expect less and less progressively as you go until it's natural not to have cake at all.

Remember, you will fail. At least once, you'll have an off day and have a larger piece of cake. That's normal. It doesn't mean you failed and it doesn't mean you have to start over from the beginning. Give yourself permission to be imperfect and pick up where you left off.

8. **Find the trigger.**



Something started this habit. In the case above, having something sweet is generally "triggered" by the act of finishing a meal. Many people who smoke like to light up at certain times, such as after eating, coming home after work, or after sex.

What are the triggers that kick off the habits? What are the reasons that you suddenly and irresistibly need that cigarette or that slice of cake? What are the common indications that mean your habit is going to start and nag at you? Record these. Make a list of when, where and under what circumstances the craving/desire/need comes up. Remember to add your emotional state at the time and who was with you. Often our choice of companions will determine when the habits kick in. Remember, you form habits as a repeated reward. For example, bringing home ice cream might be a reward for a horrible day. So that eventually becomes whenever you have a “bad day,” you’ll find yourself going back into the ice cream tub for more comfort. Think about how you would record this. Your emotional state might be “frazzled,” your location is “home,” and you’re “alone.” Recording the details brings it out of the dark recesses of “habit.” It potentially makes you aware of where your habit originates and the cause at its root.

#### 9. **Now that you have the pattern you can substitute.**

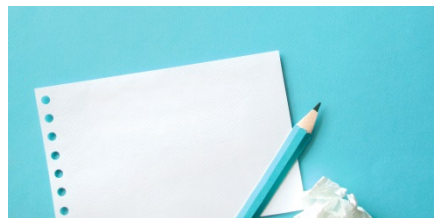
You can’t avoid having a stressful day, that’s beyond your control. But if you’re trying to lose weight, diving into the ice cream isn’t going to help.

Try to substitute the reward. Instead of eating ice cream, try something different. Exercise is probably not what you want to hear, but it is a viable option, and it will allow you to get rid of the pent-

up energy from stress you had to hold inside all day. And who knows, you might find you enjoy that walk after work.

Or change something else. Don’t go home. Take yourself out, find someplace to clear your mind. Museums, libraries, concerts, someplace, anyplace that is neither home nor work will work so that the habit doesn’t kick in. Once you are home, you’ll be in a different emotional state, and so the habit won’t be triggered. Or if loneliness is at the root, avoid being alone. Call some friends, ask them over for a chat or a movie night. Change one thing on that trigger and the habit won’t be set off. If it is, try a different substitution.

#### 10. **Write things down.**



Maybe going on a five-mile run isn’t a realistic option instead of a bucket of ice cream. But try a gentle walk around the block, you don’t have to push yourself to the extreme of a marathon runner or Olympic weightlifter. Spend some time trying different alternatives.

When you find one that works for you, jot it down. Make a record of alternatives. Use that to remind yourself what options you have. If there are several, record them all.

Add the initial trigger. In the above example, find a small notepad or

journal and write out “When I have a bad or stressful day at work, I will call my friend and go for coffee” or “I will walk around the block.” Writing it outreaches your subconscious and starts the change.

When that trigger hits, read your note. That will reinforce the behavior. And then go out and do it. Repetition is the key to reprogramming the automatic response to triggers.

Breaking bad habits can be very difficult, but *redirecting* bad habits is much easier and allows you to use that automatic response to healthier rewards.

#### 11. **Keep in mind that you’re going to have bad days.**

No plan is perfect. There will be days when a walk around the block or a cup of coffee just won’t cut through the accumulated stress of the day. Have a backup plan. Remember to have an alternative plan handy.

What sort of plan? Remember that it’s ok to make mistakes. Now, while you’re calm and not having



the trigger sending off these messages, set down your alternative plan. ‘*I forgive myself*’ is a viable option, ‘*I will return to the plan if I slip backward*’ is another. The alternate plan should always remind you somewhere that mistakes are not a failure. Slipping



up one day does not invalidate the entire process, nor does it negate the progress you've made.

12. **Make it public.** Let friends and family know what



you're planning and why. Post it on social media, make a public, clear declaration that you are going to lose weight, or stop smoking, or whatever it is you're going to dedicate yourself to achieving.

Friends and family will support you, but only if they know what it is you're doing in the beginning. The very act of declaring your aim will strengthen your resolve. It's easier to return to old habits when no one knows what you're doing. It's much harder if there are people in your corner rooting for you.

13. **Be accountable.** Report to a friend or family member every day. "Today I only had three cigarettes." "Today I walked around the block instead of eating everything I wanted to." Keeping



yourself accountable to someone means getting an instant reward (their congratulations) for succeeding and instant feedback (their disappointment) when you miss your goal.

But take care and choose this person very carefully. You will need

someone that will *not* try to shame or embarrass you when you slip. You're looking for a cheerleader, someone who will be happy for you when you succeed.

Having someone to be accountable to can have other benefits. For example, if you've had a stressful day, your accountability partner might be able to help you find a way to deal with the stress of the day without binge eating. He/she might even be able to join you for that walk. If part of your trigger is you being alone, you may only need someone to talk to avoid the trigger.

14. **Trolls are everywhere, not just on the social networks.**

There are and always will be those people in your life who will tell you that you cannot do something. They may tell you somethingsinevitable, that you might as well accept being overweight/ a smoker/ nail biter, etc.

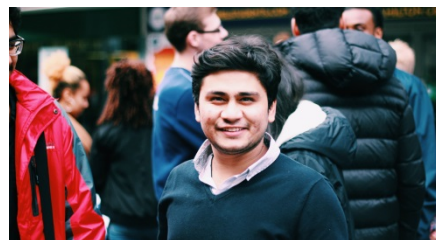
One sure way to spot this sort of person, besides the inevitability of bad habits, is the use of labels. You're a "smoker" not someone who smokes. You're "obese" rather than an overweight man/woman. Labels define us, and the trolls will use these to keep you down.

Trolls come in all shapes and sizes. They could be co-workers, friends, siblings, parents, and sometimes even spouses. These are not healthy relationships. However, in their minds, they are doing nothing wrong. It could be that they honestly believe what they're

saying because they have failed themselves in trying to defeat that same habit. Or perhaps they were too afraid to try. It could be that they are trying to "protect you from disappointment."

Life is complicated though, and you might not always be in a position to leave these people behind. They might be family. Or they're loved ones who genuinely mean well. If that's the case, these are not the people you want for accountability partners.

For these people, don't talk to them about your plans. Leave that for the ones who support you. If it's a friend, you might want to question that friendship, as it might well be toxic.



You will have a much harder time making a change if people bombard you with negativity. So, it's very important to only surround yourself with people who are in your corner no matter what. When you get home, after hanging out with your friends and family, how do you feel? Are you stronger, more positive or are you depressed and feeling overwhelmed. Evaluate your social activities, and then spend time doing the things you love with people that make you better just by being there.

15. **Consider getting help.** Hypnotherapists, psychologists, behavioral specialists, even groups such as AA. People who have been where you are now and have managed to break through the

habits.

Before you arbitrarily toss that idea aside, remember that sometimes we all need a little outside help. There's no shame in consulting with a professional.

## A Few Extra Thoughts on Reducing Stress



Remember, stressful situations will more often than not encourage you to turn toward that bad habit for comfort. Finding ways to reduce stress in your life, means that you'll have less need for those habits to fill that need within you that stress causes. What are some ways you can reduce stress in small ways?

- Does part of your stressful day include phone calls? Make yourself think of a loved one or favorite vacation spot every time you hear the phone ringing.
- Take advantage of odd moments. If you're between classes or in an elevator, tell yourself one thing for which you're grateful. It might seem silly or artificial at first, but it becomes a habit. Remembering something or someone that makes you happy takes the sting out of the stress and lowers the tension. Counting your blessings in an elevator will begin to make you feel better about life.

- Leveraging relationships to bring about change is a good way to initiate positive change. If there is someone who expects you to take care of yourself, you're more apt to put in the effort. If there someone who expects you to show up, you're more likely to put in the effort. Talk to your friends, talk to your family. It's an extension of the accountability partner. But instead of just reporting, you're going to meet their expectations, and you're going to go that extra step for them.

There are also some non-conventional alternatives for you to consider in managing both your stress and habits.

### 1. Hypnosis.

There is a long success record of using hypnosis to overcome bad habits. After all, hypnosis deals with the subconscious which is where you store habits. Hypnosis tailors the individual. What works for one may not work for another. It may take a few sessions to figure out what works and what doesn't, much like substituting the rewards as discussed earlier.

Most people have heard the term



“post-hypnotic suggestion,” but that is one small piece of hypnotherapy. And no, it doesn't involve clucking like a chicken. Positive visualization

guided imagery, learning the core of the trigger, exploring the reason for the habit, all of these and more are available through hypnosis.

2. **Visualization.** Recently, studies have been supporting what many of us already knew. Vivid imagery of something can be as useful to the brain as the real-life experience. Visualization can help you focus on alternatives to triggers. Picturing yourself home alone after a stressful day and doing something positive can change your habit away from the ice cream.

### 3. Mindfulness Meditation.

Mindfulness is the act of bringing attention to the events happening at the moment. Remember that you



form habits from stimulus from the past. Mindfulness makes the mind focus on the here and now. With roots in Buddhism, Mindfulness can break patterns of old habits by being “now” and not “then.” In other words, separating the trigger from the present day.

### To achieve this:



- a. Visualize the trigger. Using the same example, visualize yourself coming home alone after a very stressful day.
- b. Pay attention to the way that feels. Are you stressed? Are you angry? Sad? Lonely? What is the predominant emotion and what is the mixture? Try to figure out the emotional component to the trigger.
- c. Now, while you're there, relax your body. You don't want to follow the visualization into the emotion. Relax and concentrate on breathing in and out. You want to identify the emotion, not feel it.
- d. Feel the urge in your body. Visualizing the stress when you're home alone after a bad day, you'll likely have a craving for ice cream. But, it goes away. It will hit and then taper off as you continue to breathe slowly, in and out. Why? Because you're NOT getting home after a stressful day, but here, now, relaxed and meditating.
- e. Thank yourself. This recognition is an important step. For this to make an impression, it needs to be a good thing. Thanking yourself gives you positive reinforcement.

So, what's the best way to break a bad habit? Simple – use the way that works best for you. No two people will have the same results from the same input. It may take time, to find out which options are best for you. Maybe it's a combination of more than one. Keep an open mind as you try these various methods. Eventually, you're going to hit on the one that works right for you.

## Conclusion

Don't kick yourself for bad habits. Yes, we all have them. But more than that, try to remember that this habit started for a reason and chances are, it was a way to keep you safe or happy or secure at one time.

As children, being rejected can feel like the end of the world. If we haven't had the experience in a social group to handle those feelings of not belonging, they return all throughout our lives. So, in the end, bad habits are born of necessity. Sometimes it's the necessity to hide emotions. Sometimes it's a form of self-care. Whatever the reason, these "bad" habits once had a purpose.

Only now, when we see how damaging and unhealthy they are, do we realize we need to address the habits and change the way we react. What's worse, left untended bad habits can keep us from growing and becoming the person we're meant to be.

Lucky for us, bad habits can be broken, redirected, and altered.

So, give yourself the time and energy to change. You are certainly worth the effort. You *can* succeed. You *will* succeed.

