

Breaking bad habits

Bad habits may be hard to change, but it can be done. Smoking, for example, can be stopped. So can alcohol abuse.

If you could only ... but why don't you? Scientists at the NIH study what happens in your brain as habits form. They come about through repetition. Brushing your teeth in the morning is a good habit. Reaching for a cigarette—bad habit.

Habits trigger pleasure centers in your brain. First, focus on becoming more aware of your bad habits. Then try these strategies to counteract them:

- Avoid tempting situations. If you don't buy candy bars, it won't be as easy to eat one.
- Prepare mentally. Think about how you want to handle it and mentally practice what you plan.
- Enlist support. Ask friends, family, and coworkers to support your efforts to change.
- Replace unhealthy bad habits with healthy ones. Exercise or try a new hobby.
- Reward yourself for small steps.

