

Momentum

Breaking bad habits



Creighton
UNIVERSITY

Employee Assistance Program
1-800-424-4831

Identifying triggers

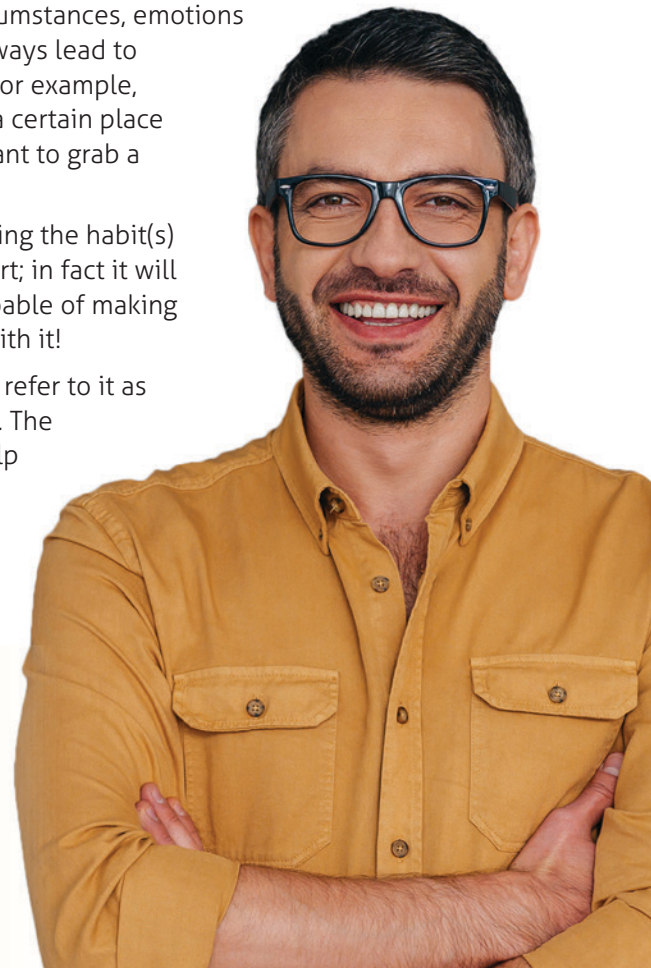
- ✓ Consider keeping a "habit diary." Note the time of day, your mood, where you were and what you were feeling when your undesirable habit occurred.
- ✓ Having documented and learned about your behavior patterns, you'll be more aware of how certain situations trigger your need to repeat your habit.
- ✓ Awareness of behavioral triggers helps you develop a plan for avoiding them. Next time you encounter a trigger situation, vow not to give in to its pull.

Undoing the power of habits

We all harbor bad habits. From binge-watching too much TV to gorging on junk food to feeding an addiction to drinking, smoking or Facebook—there are plenty of minor vices you might use to alleviate stress and boredom. With some awareness and effort, however, you can beat bad habits.

Why are habits so hard to overcome? Repeating certain behaviors when you're on "autopilot" triggers the brain's reward centers and fills a need, making the habits hard to overcome. Here are some ways to fight back.

- Identify your negative habits and look at their triggers—the specific circumstances, emotions or environments—that always lead to the unwanted behavior. (For example, feeling stress or being in a certain place may cause someone to want to grab a cigarette.)
- Accept the fact that breaking the habit(s) will not be a leisurely effort; in fact it will be difficult, but you're capable of making the change and sticking with it!
- Write down your goal and refer to it as often as needed each day. The frequent reminder will help you stay on track.



Enjoyable behaviors can release the brain chemical dopamine, which further strengthens bad habits. This explains why you may crave certain substances or experiences even though you no longer feel good once attaining them.

Log on to MagellanHealth.com/member today!

Magellan
HEALTHCARE SM

Plan to replace bad with good

Proactively swap out bad habits with healthier behaviors.

- The habits you maintain—whether good or bad—are in your life for a reason. These behaviors provide a benefit to you in some way, even if they are bad for you in other ways.
- Recognizing the underlying causes of your bad habit is vital to overcoming it.
- Make changes in your environment (at home, work or when socializing) to minimize the effect that situational triggers have on you.
- Replace a bad habit with something healthier. Then, when you encounter the usual behavior trigger, you'll have a plan in place to beat the urge.
 - An example of a replacement behavior is to have a container of cut fresh vegetables handy when you're tempted to reach for junk food. If you have the urge to smoke, do breathing exercises or chew gum.
 - Replacing a habit doesn't erase your need for the original behavior, but you can strengthen the new behavior and suppress the original.

Encouraging yourself and others



Give and get support

Find a buddy who, like you, is trying to kick a certain habit. Or, depending on the type of compulsion with which you struggle, join a support group targeting that specific behavior. By being both accountable and mutually supportive to others, you'll maintain a better focus on your goal.



Take your time

While conventional wisdom has held that it takes 21 or 28 days to overcome a habit, current research shows that most people need about three months—and sometimes more—to substitute a new behavior for a bad habit. Give yourself time to make the change.



Have self-compassion

Remember that breaking an adverse, automatic habit is one of the most challenging things you can do. It takes perseverance, and sometimes multiple unsuccessful attempts, to replace a bad habit. If you slip and revert to the unwanted habit, analyze why it occurred and try again tomorrow!

Additional Sources: National Institutes of Health MedlinePlus, Arthur B. Markman, Ph.D., James Clear, Psych Central.



Webinar—Join us for a webinar on Wednesday, Sept. 13: *The Path to Stress Relief: Unraveling the Mystery of The Yellow Brick Road*. Register [here](#).