Breaking a Negative Habit One Day at a Time

When you have poor habits for dealing with stress, anxiety, and boredom, your life is headed in the wrong direction. These habits can derail your success. These habits are challenging to change, so this lesson is especially important. There are small and simple steps that can be utilized to attack your negative habits one day at a time.

Unless you're perfect, you probably have a habit that drives you or others nuts. The conflicting nature of bad habits makes them difficult to overcome. ***What is your bad habit?***

Typically, the top bad habits we indulge in are eating unhealthy foods, smoking, using chewing tobacco, lying on the sofa instead of exercising, and nail-biting.

The good news is, however, that whatever negative habit you have, ***you have the power to change it if you want to.***

Consider these strategies for inspiration to break your negative habit now:

1. **Avoid getting overwhelmed.** Realize your goal now is to simply decrease the occurrence of the negative behavior. ***As you endeavor to gradually reduce the behavior, you'll feel better and more in control.*** Eventually, you may be able to stop the habit.

2. **Focus on a daily mini-goal to help you make small adjustments.** Let's say you typically eat more breads and carbohydrates than recommended. You have two bowls of cereal for breakfast and eat two sandwiches for lunch. You think you could reduce your daily carbs. But you're caught in a vicious cycle and keep eating the same things each day.

    - Set a specific mini-goal to reduce carb intake by making one small change daily. You'll be motivated to turn around your negative habit. In this example, a daily goal to reduce breads at lunch strengthens resolve to eat fewer carbs.

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- At lunch, rather than eating two sandwiches, add extra meat, cheese and vegetables to your sandwich. You'll still have a filling lunch but you'll reduce your bread intake by half.

- After you've persevered in altering your habit for six weeks to two months, then you can set another mini-goal to replace your second bowl of cereal with a bowl of fruit instead. You'll feel optimistic and ready to tackle another mini-goal in your quest to reduce carbs.

3. **Use time intervals to control your negative habit.** Maybe your negative habit is smoking. The first thing you should know is how many cigarettes you smoke in a day. Perhaps you smoke 20 cigarettes. If you're awake 16 hours a day, you're smoking slightly more than 1 cigarette per hour.

    - Allow yourself to smoke one cigarette per hour. During the first day, you'll reduce cigarette intake by four cigarettes. That's progress! By the end of the week, you'll have smoked 28 cigarettes less than you normally do. Now that's real motivation to continue the path to a smoke-free life!

    - After smoking one per hour for 10 days to two weeks, extend the time interval between cigarettes from one cigarette every hour to every 1-1/4 or 1-1/2 hours. Continue increasing time length between cigarettes until you're smoking one cigarette every 4 hours —four cigarettes daily.

    - At this point, decide either to further reduce cigarette intake or to quit smoking completely. Your one-day-at-a-time method is working.

4. **Reward yourself for your successes.** Daily, document on a calendar how you did. For example, if you met your mini-goal, record "MMG" for "met mini-goal."

    - You could also jot down the number of times you did the negative behavior that day—this method works well for those working to reduce smoking, chewing tobacco, or nail-biting behaviors.

    - Use your calendar information at the end of the month to determine if you were successful 75 percent of the time in reducing your negative habit. If so, allow yourself a reward of some type to strengthen future efforts to break your bad habit.

    - You might enjoy an afternoon of fishing or taking part in a favored hobby. Maybe a new nail polish or set of golf balls will suffice.

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Although getting rid of a bad habit is a challenge, you can break your negative habit using these one-day-at-a-time techniques. Be patient and vigilant. Consistency is paramount.

Have you been stymied on coming up with positive habits you can create to substitute for your bad habits and support your success? If so, then the next lesson is for you! You'll learn about eight habits that guarantee your success!

Get Started on the Tips in This Lesson:

Choose a negative habit and use this process to begin eliminating that habit from your life:

1. Stay relaxed. It's common to feel anxious when reducing the frequency of any habit.
2. Set mini goals to make each day more successful.
3. Use time intervals. Expand the time between occurrences of the unwanted behavior.
4. Give yourself a reward when you're successful.

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