



# Tips to help you break bad habits

Most of life is habitual. We tend to do the same things we did yesterday and the day before and habits, good or bad, make us who we are. The key is controlling and changing our bad habits and developing and promoting our good ones. If you know how to change your habits, then even a small effort can create big (and positive) changes in your life.

## Step 1: The pay-off

The first step in breaking a bad habit is to look at why you find this action so compelling. In other words, what's the 'pay-off' for doing this seemingly negative thing? Since you've already classified this as a 'bad' habit you may be tempted to say there isn't one. But look closer.

There is always a pay-off. For example, let's say your bad habit is eating a full slab of chocolate when you get stressed. What's in it for you? You let off some steam and feel a little better for the moment. Or you have a bad habit of leaving the dishes unwashed? The pay-off could be that you get to spend more time watching TV or reading a book.

## Step 2: The trade-off

Next, take a look at the trade-off. What is it that you are losing by exercising your habit? This step should be easier. Just think why it is that you consider it a bad habit in the first place. Eating a full slab of chocolate is a bad habit because it can lead to weight gain and health complications. Leaving the dishes undone is a bad habit because your kitchen becomes chaotic and unsightly. To have more TV/reading time you are trading off having a pleasant living environment. When you look at it in this way, it can make breaking bad habits easier.

## Step 3: The decision

Now that you've weighed both sides of the issue (your pay-off and trade-off) you can make a choice. It's no longer an involuntary act because now you know that you are making a choice every time you perform this action. You are choosing what you value more: the pay-off or the trade-off.

Every time you start to do the 'bad' habit, you now have the conscious choice: **Which do you value more? Which is more important for you in the long-run and why?**

## Step 4: The substitution

The underlying reason why you formed the habits you have is that they fill a need. You have stress/tension that needs relief or you have a desire to unwind watching TV or by reading. As you break the old patterns, you still need a way to fulfil these needs. You will not only be making an active choice to not do the old action, but also making a choice to perform a better, alternative action in its place. Instead of eating that chocolate bar, you might decide to go for a run every time you are feeling tense. Instead of letting dirty dishes pile up, you may decide to use paper plates when you are eating alone.

Whatever the new habit is, the substitution is effective only if you feel good about the choices you have made. After all, the reason you considered it a bad habit in the first place is because it left you feeling bad about yourself in some way.

## Step 5: The willpower

It is important to realise that the only way to prevent falling back into old routines and old habits is to routinely remind yourself why you needed to change your habits. Every time you catch yourself starting to resume your old patterns, remind yourself of your X for Y trade-off. Making this a conscious thought pattern each time will force you to make a choice about maintaining the changes you have implemented.

***Even as you focus on the new habit, the new you, you still must face the reality of giving up the old habit. The more changes you can make in the patterns of your daily life to support quitting your bad habit and instilling good habits, the more successful you will be.***