

# Breaking Bad Habits



45% of tasks we perform every day are habits. If all of these tasks were conscious, we would be overwhelmed. Some of these habits, however, are harmful. They can prevent us from reaching personal, financial, and fitness-related goals. Follow this three-step process to break those bad habits!

## Bad Workplace Habits

- Being late for work or meetings
- Thinking negatively
- Gossiping
- Seeking attention
- Procrastinating
- Multitasking

## Personal Bad Habits

- Lying
- Drinking
- Smoking
- Skipping breakfast
- Biting fingernails
- Overeating
- Internet surfing

# Breaking Bad Habits

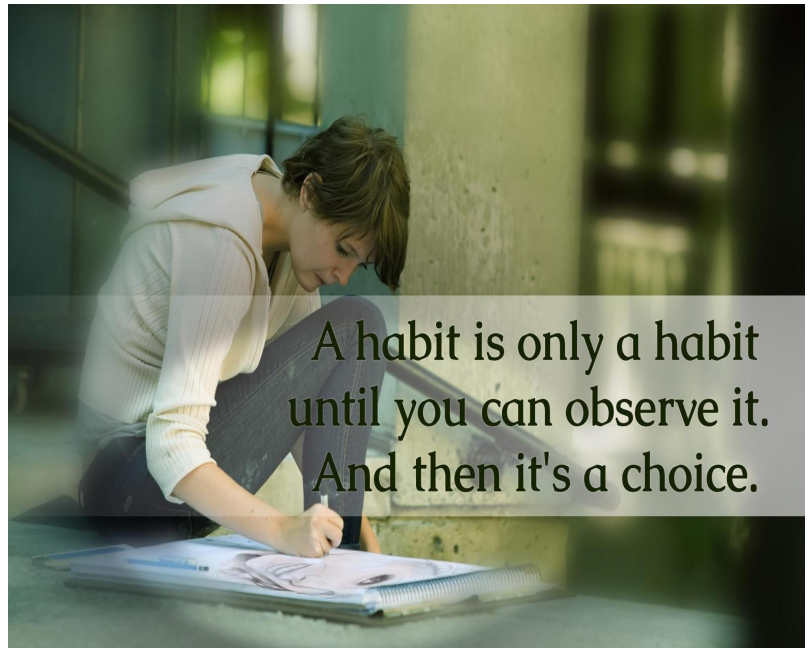
Habits can be broken down into three parts: cue, routine, and reward. The habit is cued by a feeling or situation, becomes a routine due to repetition, and usually produces a rewarding feeling or satisfying outcome. This reward is the reason bad habits are difficult to break. Identifying the cue and changing the routine make it possible to earn the reward without engaging in the bad habit.

One approach to making your habits conscious may be to keep track of how often the habits are occurring. "Log it," says Janet L. Wolfe, PhD, a clinical psychologist in New York City. "This will help you establish a baseline," she says. "Put down the antecedents, the emotions surrounding the knuckle cracking and what goes through your head when you crack your knuckles," she says. "This will make your bad habit more conscious." Wolfe suggests keeping the habit log for at least a week in order to analyze the data and identify triggers.

# 1

## Identify the cue.

Most habits, both good and bad, occur without us giving any thought to what we are doing. We repeat a routine over and over without even realizing it. To prevent this, try to think about where you are, what the situation is, and why you start engaging in your bad habit. "If you can notice when you are doing it and under what circumstances and what feelings are attached to it, you might be able to figure out why you are doing it and be able to stop," says Susan Jaffe, MD, a psychiatrist in private practice in New York City.



A habit is only a habit  
until you can observe it.  
And then it's a choice.

breakingmuscle.com  
greatist.com  
webmd.com  
mindtools.com

memphisewingmachine.com

# Breaking Bad Habits

## 2

### Break the routine.

It is difficult to simply stop engaging in a routine that has been habit for as long as you can remember. Having a conscious plan as to how you intend to overcome your bad habit is a good place to start. Self-vigilance is a crucial part of habit-breaking. An example of this might be to work habit-breaking into your personal goals and review your progress each day. Seeing your progression may be an encouragement. Work on maintaining perseverance and self-discipline. One form of discipline may be to set obstacles in your way. For example, if you are tempted to overeat when you have desserts in the house, don't make or buy those desserts. If you are tempted to surf the Internet instead of working, disconnect your internet service or turn off your computer. Once you have taken this step, engage in positive, healthy, and practical behaviors instead. Find a motivator to keep you on track. For example, think about the health benefits of not eating the dessert or the work you will get done if you don't waste time on the Internet.

When we engage in activities we find pleasurable, our brains release dopamine, which activates the brain's reward center. This gives us a happy or satisfying feeling that encourages us to engage in the behavior again, and the activity becomes a habit.

## 3

### Reward yourself.

Treat yourself to small rewards when you see yourself improving. Rewards will be most effective if they are enjoyed soon after the positive behavior. Instead of receiving the good feeling (produced by a dopamine surge) that you get from the bad habit, you will receive it instead from the reward.

Research shows that an alternate behavior or thought pattern must be in place for an average of 66 days before your brain recognizes it as your new routine. This seems overwhelming, but if it kicks your bad habit, it is worth your time and effort. Once your routine is established as a habit, the reward will no longer be necessary to maintaining your positive behavior.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Monthly Health Challenge: Break One Bad Habit

### Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (desk, fridge, car, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you **don't** perform your bad habit.
3. Use the calendar to record the actions and choices you make to help you make your habits healthy habits.
4. At the end of the month, total the number of days you didn't perform your bad habit. You must do this on at least 22 days this month to complete this challenge. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

**The Bad Habit I Wish to Break Is:**

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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

**Number of Days I was Successful:**