

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a pink top, is shown from the chest up. She is holding a white cigarette with both hands, breaking it in the middle. The cigarette is held horizontally, and the two halves are slightly separated. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

How Your Bad Habits Are Robbing You of The Life You Crave

It happens like clockwork every January 1: You declare *this is the year* you're finally going to clean up your act. You're going to eat healthier, quit smoking, or be more organized.

By the time January 31 rolls around, though, you've lost your drive to hold yourself to those promises. The bad habits you swore you were going to kick are still there.

Were you crazy to think you could change?

Bad habits are a frustrating and persistent part of life. We all have them. Unfortunately, they can hold you back from reaching your goals and lead to negative outcomes in your personal and professional life.

Like many others, you may have tried to replace a bad habit with a good one. Instead of having a cigarette after dinner, you brush your teeth. Instead of doomscrolling through social media, you take a walk or read a book.

Or maybe you're dealing with a bad habit now that you don't know how to shake.

If you want to increase your chances of breaking a bad habit, you have to understand where the habit came from. Once you understand why you do it, you can come up with strategies to get rid of it.



What are your bad habits?

Habits are automatic behaviors that you engage in without conscious effort. Some of them work for you and some of them work against you.

Good habits are things you do that benefit your physical, emotional, or mental health. Brushing your teeth, washing your hands before eating, and reading before bed are examples of good habits that have a positive effect on you.

Bad habits, on the other hand, are things you do that harm your physical, emotional, or mental health. They're usually a result of trying to deal with stress, boredom, or anxiety.

Whether you're aware of it or not, your bad habits serve a specific purpose or fulfill a need. That's a problem because a bad habit tends to make the original problem worse.

For example:

- You might procrastinate at work to avoid a task you don't like. But by putting it off, you may miss an important deadline and lose an important client.

- You might bite your nails to self-soothe when you're feeling anxious. But this can lead to damaged nails or oral health issues.
- You might spend too much time on your smartphone or laptop to quiet your racing mind from working a stressful job. But too much screen time can cause obesity as a result of sedentary behavior or vision problems due to constant eye strain.

Emotional eating, overspending, negative self talk—they're all examples of bad habits that rob you of a life you crave.

And they're all bad habits you can overcome.



What's causing your bad habits?

You can replace bad habits with good habits, but first you have to understand what's driving the bad habit. Despite the fact it doesn't help you, it's still serving you in some way.

If you want to increase your chances of breaking a bad habit, you have to know its root cause. If you don't address the underlying issue causing the bad habit, you can't avoid what triggers it.

To figure out what's causing your bad habit, ask yourself some questions:

- What need or desire is the bad habit fulfilling?
- What emotions or feelings do you experience before, during, and after the bad habit?

- What situations or environments trigger the bad habit?
- What are the consequences or costs of the bad habit?

Answering these questions will provide insight into the root cause of your bad habit so you can identify potential solutions.

Your answers to these questions might even offer some insight into good habits that form to replace the bad ones.

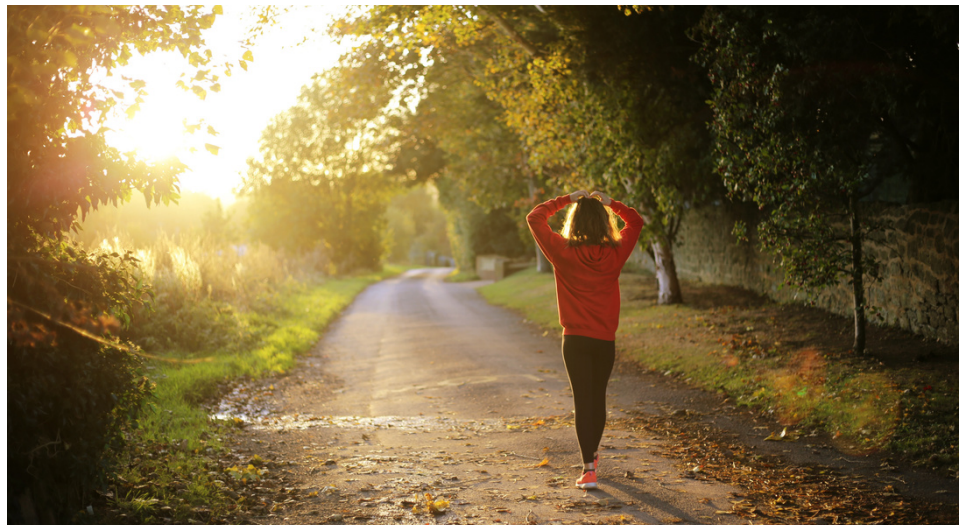
Strategies to understand your bad habits

There are lots of strategies you can use to figure out the root cause of your bad habit, like journaling or seeking help from friends, family, or a health care professional.

Journaling is a valuable self-reflection tool because it creates a record of your thoughts, feelings, and actions surrounding your bad habit. Revisiting your journal entries can help you identify patterns and triggers.

Talking to a trusted friend, family member, or therapist about your bad habit can also help you come up with ideas on how to change it. And someone who has overcome the same bad habit will have insights and suggestions that can help you change yours.

Don't be afraid to try different strategies to drill down to the core of your bad habit. Once you finally get there, you can take the next step: Replacing your bad habit with a good one.



Substitute a good habit

Replacing bad habits with good habits is a powerful way to change your behavior for the better.

Here are some examples of strategies that may help you beat your bad habit:

Bad habit: Smoking

Good habit: Take up a new hobby (or spend time on one you already love) or find a healthy way to deal with boredom, like going for a walk or reading a book. Cravings usually last only 10 or 15 minutes, so keep yourself occupied for at least that long until the craving for a cigarette passes.

Bad habit: Procrastinating

Good habit: Prioritize your tasks by creating a to-do list, setting specific deadlines, and breaking tasks into smaller, manageable steps. Schedule short breaks throughout your day to help you stay focused and productive.



Bad habit: Negative self-talk

Good habit: Practice positive self-talk and self-compassion and challenge your negative thoughts. Is what you're saying to and about yourself actually true? Are there facts to back it up? The answer is almost always no. Surround yourself with positive influences, such as supportive friends or mentors, and seek professional help if you need it.

Bad habit: Mindless snacking

Good habit: Plan and prepare nutritious snacks in advance, practice portion control, and eat mindfully by paying attention to the taste, texture, and smell of your food. Find alternative ways to cope with your boredom or stress, such as going for a walk or practising relaxation techniques.

Bad habit: Neglecting your self-care

Good habit: Set aside dedicated time for self-care activities, create a bedtime routine, and practice relaxation techniques such as meditation or deep breathing. Learn to say no and give yourself permission to do it more often.

The important thing to remember is if the first good habit you try to implement doesn't stick, try another until you figure out what works best for you. Changing any habit takes time and effort!

Give up your bad habits

It's not always easy to replace bad habits with good ones, but breaking free from negative patterns and creating lasting change will always make your life better.

If you can't seem to shake a bad habit, take some time to understand where the habit came from and why you do it. Reflect on your behaviors and the patterns that are keeping the bad habit alive.

Set goals for yourself and align new, positive habits with those goals. Then come up with a plan that will clearly set out how you'll replace your bad habit with a good one.

Remember to be patient with yourself, and don't get discouraged if you have setbacks. Stay committed and stay persistent. Bad habits can be broken.

