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How to Break Bad Habits: A Practical Behavioral Approach

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Abstract:

Bad habits are a series of behaviors that are repeated and reinforced over time and may happen automatically when certain cues or cues are present. Examples include too much time on the screen, procrastination, eating the wrong food, smoking, and nail-biting. Physical, mental, productivity and quality of life can suffer as a result of these behaviors. The only thing that can help overcome a bad habit is to understand what the habit loop is: the cue, the routine, and the reward. This is a short communication in which the evidence-based strategies for habit change: self-awareness, modifying environment, replacement behaviours, goal setting, self-monitoring and social supports, are highlighted. The application of these techniques can be repeated over time and the undesirable behaviors will start to weaken and healthy behavior will start to take its place. Habit change is an ongoing process that takes time, self-compassion and reinforcement.

Key words: Bad habits, behaviour change, self control, habit formation, healthy lifestyle, self monitoring

INTRODUCTION

Habits are an automatic behavior that has been learnt by repetition and reinforcement. Positive habits help to build health and well-being, but negative habits create an impediment to personal, social, and professional functioning. Some people may have trouble breaking down undesirable habits, as habits are so much part of behavior that they tend to become hard to change and may be triggered by a specific environment or emotion. If a person knows how to form a habit, he or she will be able to do it in an effective way.

HABITS have three steps:

1. Cue (Trigger): The time, location, emotion or situation that starts the behavior.
2. Routine (Behavior): Action that is regularly repeated.
3. Reward: Benefit or satisfaction that comes from the behavior.

For instance, stress (cue) causes one to use a lot more social media (routine) as a means of distraction or

relief (temporary reward). The first step towards busting a bad habit is to identify its component parts.

The following strategies can be used to help overcome bad habits.

1. Increase Self-Awareness

- Identify when, where, and why habit is occurring. A habit diary may be helpful for identifying triggers and patterns.
- It doesn't need to be eliminated, it needs to be replaced 2.
- It is better to substitute an unhealthy behavior with something healthy than just to try to stop the unhealthy behavior. For example, if you normally eat unhealthy snacks, you can consider switching to fruits and cut back on overeating.

3. Modify the Environment

- Minimizing exposure to triggers decreases the chance of doing the habit. Getting rid of distractions, limiting access to tempting things and setting up supportive environments can make change easier.

4. Set Realistic Goals

- Small goals help motivate and contribute to the possibility of success. Slowly decreasing is preferable to sudden change.

5. Monitor Progress

- Daily monitoring can give feedback, reinforce commitment. Using a progress chart or mobile app can be helpful.

6. Seek Social Support

- Encouragement, accountability and motivation can come from family members, friends or a support group throughout the behavior change process.

7. Practice Self-Compassion

- Sometimes, as you are trying to change the habit, you will have a setback. Learning from lapses and not considering them as failures keeps people motivated and resilient.

CONCLUSION

It takes time to break bad habits—you have to be aware, plan, and keep at it. Knowing what triggers habits and how to change bad habits into good ones can help make the chances of success much greater. Behavior change efforts are supported by environmental modifications, goal setting, self-monitoring and social support. By being persistent and patient, people could break bad habits and create a healthier and more productive lifestyle.

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