

**How to Break Bad
Habits:
Ultimate Guide to
Good Habits**

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What's a Habit Anyway?

And how do they become part of who I am?

Every living creature's life is dictated by its habits. They are essential to adaptation, a feature of living systems that helps them survive. Basically, they are responses to stimuli in our environment and affect the way we interact with the environment in the future. Now let's learn how they are formed.

Adopting a Habit

Scientifically, habits are said to be acquired through repeated experiences or strong singular experiences. We typically perform them without knowledge of it. The automation of habits make them distinguishing features among individuals, often contributing to others' perception of them.

Psychologist Mortimer Adler, Ph.D., believed habits were 'formed abilities', learned over extended periods of exposure. He equates their formation to humans attempted to perfect themselves, regardless of the nature of the habit. His justification was an infant's desire to fulfill inherent developmental potentialities.

The process of growth as an infant – acquired learning – occurs through the repetition of

actions and events or through observation (experience). The infant attempts to reflect the world around it.

Habits aren't to be confused with skills. While the former can be forgotten and/or relearned, the latter cannot. Speech is such a skill. You can't unlearn how to speak unless due to mental trauma.

Even isolation from something like language might be able to lessen your ability to perform, but as soon as you're reintegrated into a society where the language is frequently used, its nuances will all flow back to you as though never lost.

A more classic example is that of the bicyclist. They say once you learn to ride a bike, you never forget. And they're correct.

It's a motor skill that won't disappear regardless of how long it's been since you've ridden a bike. You can test it out by yourself if you haven't ridden a bike in quite some time. Your balance and directional ability will all still be intact.

Now assume that the bicyclist developed a habit of always whistling when he rode (although this can be applied to any range of activities from cooking to washing a car). Out

of habit, the bicyclist might whistle whenever they ride a bike. Onlookers might mention to them that they're whistling with them completely oblivious to the fact. Because it's been molded into a habit, it occurs with no conscious effort.

The study of habit development is of particularly strong interest to psychologists because it provides insight into how people are capable of learning. However, it should also be noted that when habits are driven to extremes, they can soon and easily become mental disorders worthy of medical treatment.

The Formation of Habits

As mentioned earlier, habits are responses to experiences in our lives. They can also manifest alongside the acquisition of skills (whistling bicyclist). The average adult has undoubtedly already learned to walk, run, and sit. These are their skills. Habits might manifest themselves through those skills in the form of starting walking on the same foot every time, taking two small steps preceding a sprint, or wiping a chair with the hand before sitting down. Even the way one sits can be a habit, particularly when it becomes reflexive or the "most comfortable" way to sit, such as with crossed legs.

An example that clearly illustrates one's psychological state as an impetus for the onset of a habit is a person with vastly discolored teeth. Suffering from ridicule from them, the person eventually comes to smile and talk largely with their mouth closed.

Even after correcting the nuisance, the person continues to prevent exposure of their teeth simply because it's become such a regular part of their existence.

Emotionally-Charged Habits

For the most part, all of the previous examples of habit formation are based on physical sources. However, habits can also – and are probably more frequently – formed as the result of emotional distress. The most common of this type of habit is procrastination. As the result of having a large deal of work to complete, many people choose to forego it. Procrastination is a habit that they form to avoid that stress.

Other habits still are formed as a means of protection against perceived possibilities of danger. This type of habit-forming is crucial to the survival of any creature. Checking to make sure all doors are locked before going to sleep and regularly visiting an auto shop are positive

ways in which forming habits can influence your life.

Changing Habits

Bad Habits and How to Change Them

What do broken dreams, lost opportunities, and wasted time all have in common?

They can all be attributed to bad habits. One time or another, we've all attributed something as being a bad habit or had someone point something out to us as one.

Recognizing detrimental habits tends to be much simpler than actually solving them because habits are integrated into our lifestyles.

Changing those habits requires a bit more effort than may seem worth it at first, but if we understand the roots of those habits, the process becomes less painstaking.

The Difficulty of Breaking Habits

Change is never easy to adapt to. One way or another, it requires strength of will; the same is true of breaking habits. The hardship of breaking them is evident in the sheer number of people who give up altogether. Bad habits are almost like additions – things that bring us pleasure despite not being healthy choices. In these situations, they're even more difficult to

bring an end to. Removing habits that bring you a sense of comfort puts you in a situation where the world seems daunting.

The Biology of Habits

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a lot of the struggle in breaking habits can be attributed to the properties of your neurons. The formation of habits alters the way your brain processes information. Changes in neural activity rewire your brain to include these habits.

Extended practice of the habit strengthens the neural changes that occur, making them increasingly permanent. These habits form in the basal ganglia, the part of the brain with some control over both learning and addiction.

Simply overcoming a habit won't remove the neural connection that has been formed in the brain. Thus, someone can't completely break a habit.

If a situation ever arises that can be associated with the past habit, the neural connection will be stimulated, and the possibility for the reemergence of the habit surfaces. Cigarette-shaped objects, ashtrays, or any instance of smoke can be all that's needed to get a "quitter" to pick up smoking again.

Old vs. New

Because continual practice reinforces habits the way it does, new habits are much easier to break than older ones. Old habits are tantamount to part of your lifestyle while newer ones more closely correlate to short-lived fads, in terms of breaking them.

To get a better perspective on the idea, consider a man who makes coffee for himself every morning at 7 o'clock. After adjusting to the routine of doing this for years, the man stays in a hotel for work-related matters. Having no easily accessible kitchen and no way to make coffee for himself, he feels quite strange and disoriented. His morning is incomplete, even if he does manage to get coffee.

One thing that keeps the man from completely losing it is the expectation that he'll be able to fall back into routine the very next day. If he had to go an entire week without the luxury of his own coffeemaker, he might slowly begin to lose a grip on himself. A victim of OCD, to reach towards an extreme, who compulsively brushes their hair might have a panic attack if there's no brush nearby.

Adjusting Your Habits

The first step on the road to recovering is recognizing the source of the habit. If you understand how an isolated event became part of your life, you can attack the problem at its roots.