



Good Riddance to Bad Habits.

“A habit is not to be flung out a window, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time.”
– Mark Twain

“The unfortunate thing...is that good habits are so much easier to give up than bad ones.”

– Somerset Maugham

“The best way to break a bad habit is to drop it.”

–Leo Aikman

Let’s start by taking comfort in a universal truth: “Nobody’s perfect.” In fact nobody’s anywhere near perfect. Good, now we have our one-size-fits-all explanation for why we have bad habits. If only we could end the matter there. But as you know, we can’t, because an explanation is different from an excuse. And there is never an excuse for allowing bad habits to continue unchecked. A bad habit is the enemy of progress. It slows us down, derails us, enslaves us.

So if we know all this about bad habits (and most of us do), why are they so hard to break? Let’s let Mr. Webster help us there: *Habit n. involuntary pattern of behavior acquired by frequent repetition.* This suggests that we may not even be consciously aware of our habits when they show themselves. They operate under the radar. So we need to learn to spot them, which is a good lead-in to our first suggestion for breaking bad habits, which is:

Make a list of your bad habits. As we mentioned, habits are rooted in our subconscious. But once they’re on paper, they can’t hide any more. You probably won’t be ready to tackle the whole list at once, so be realistic about it. Identify which ones you’re ready to change immediately. Then...

Rate the seriousness of your bad habit. Let’s use as an example “sedentary lifestyle.” In other words, it’s the habit of not moving one’s body enough. What are the consequences of this habit? A growing waistline, shrinking self-esteem, decreasing fitness level, shortness of breath, and increased risk for a wide variety of diseases: obviously, it spells bad news for both the short and long term. Write all this down too. Let it be your first big motivation to change. Then...

Identify the “reward” for continuing with the bad habit. Does it “just feel good” to sit? Is it your way of being good to yourself after a long day at work? Do you happen to enjoy watching TV or surfing the web more than other people do? Do you simply not like exercise and you feel you’re just being “who you are”? The

point is, sometimes we tell ourselves things that sound right, but don't hold up to any real scrutiny when we take a good hard look. Write down what you're telling yourself. Then take that good hard look. Next...

Identify what you will gain by breaking the bad habit. In our example, you would break the habit by introducing physical activity, which will immediately start moving you in the direction of a more healthful lifestyle. In fact whatever your bad habit happens to be, your health will improve in some way when you stop it. Also note that the best way to break a bad habit is replace it with good one. In this case, it's exercise. Continue to reason with yourself on the benefits. Weigh the new good habit against the old bad one. It'll help keep that positive frame of mind that promotes healthy habits. So now...

Make your choice. Once you have a clear picture of which habit is best for you, the bad one or the good one, make your choice. It may seem like a labored way to arrive at the obvious, but it really helps to purposely take the step. Why? Because you're demonstrating to yourself that you are no longer a victim of blind impulse. You have strengthened your power to choose what's right. And choice is a powerful tool. Now build on that empowerment....

Change the habit. Good habits are started the same way bad ones are, with repetition. Have a plan for each day to work on strengthening the new habits you have decided on. Write it down. Then do it. Stay focused. No negative thinking. No skipping days. No excuses. And a month or so into it (that's about how long it takes to break a habit) you'll start to see the change. Your new habit will start to feel second nature like your old one used to. From there we recommend that you...

Give yourself a high five. You have accomplished something significant. And once again you're moving in the right direction on your journey to a healthy happy life.