

Heart, not head, helps change bad habits

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Emotion, not logic, may be the real motivator for trying to change bad habits, research by U.S. doctors indicates.

Research indicates genes and environmental factors make it hard for some people to control their habits, The Washington Post said Tuesday. Researchers said what really helps to change behavior -- such as giving up smoking or becoming less sedentary -- is the desire to change, not just knowing change is needed.

Kelly Brownell, Yale Health, Emotion and Behavior Laboratory founder, said breaking bad habits involves intellectual, emotional and physical incentives -- and recognizing what triggers bad behavior in the first place. Conquering bad habits can succeed, he said, when people figure out what causes them.

"If you tend to struggle when you're lonely, then creating some kind of social network [may help conquer bad habits]. If you struggle when you're depressed, then getting help for depression makes sense," Brownell said.

Another researcher said support from others is key to successfully breaking a bad habit such as smoking or overeating.

Penalties work, too, researchers said. For example, local governments impose smoking bans, some health insurance companies charge higher premiums to policyholders with unhealthy habits and some companies chose not to hire smokers.

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