

How to... break a bad habit

January 9 2009, By Alison Johnson

With New Year's resolutions still fresh, here's some advice from local therapists on putting bad habits to rest:

Make a list. Write down all of the reasons why you want to stop a certain behavior - how it's hurting you and why getting rid of it will help. Look at that list often.

Become more aware. Many habits are hard to break because they are unconscious impulses. Turn them into choices instead: Make a written or mental note every time you do something unwanted such as biting your nails or yelling at your kids.

Substitute other activities. It's easier to replace a bad habit than stop it. If you lose your temper often, for example, practice deep breathing or go for a walk.

Break it down. Think of the steps needed to shed a habit and tackle them one at a time. To stay motivated, keep your goals simple and realistic.

Reward yourself. Before you take on a bad habit, decide what you'll do to celebrate with every baby step you complete.

Remove temptations. If you overeat, keep junk food out of your house. If you crave cigarettes with coffee, switch to tea - and avoid smoky bars or friends who light up.

Be patient. Bad habits develop over years, so you likely won't be able to

ditch them immediately. The average smoker, in fact, tries to quit about seven times before being successful.

Find support. Tell family and friends about your goal. If there's a local or online support group for people with your problem, join it.

Get help for addictions. Some habits, particularly substance abuse and smoking, involve a real physical or emotional dependency and may require professional attention.

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