

Breaking bad (eating habits)

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(HealthDay)—Breaking bad eating habits and starting good ones is one of the healthiest steps you can take.

But making [healthy choices](#) second nature can take time. After all, it's hard to change a lifetime of [bad habits](#) overnight. In fact, research published in the *European Journal of Psychology* shows it can take anywhere from a couple of weeks to many months for a new habit to feel automatic.

So how do you stay on track until your new healthy-eating plan takes hold?

First, start small. Setting too many goals or too many unrealistic ones can sabotage you right from the start.

Next, set yourself up for success. To break a 3 p.m. candy bar [habit](#), have alternatives ready to grab, like cut-up veggies, low-fat yogurt, and berries. If you work outside the home, bring some healthy, tasty snacks to work with you each day to curb mid-morning and mid-afternoon hunger. Don't leave yourself at the mercy of a vending machine.

Think about why you're snacking. Are you really hungry? Or are you just bored or maybe a little stressed out? Skip the extra calories and take a brisk 5-minute walk instead. And find a friend or co-worker who wants to make healthy changes, too. The buddy system will keep you both on track.

And if you slip up, don't give up. According to the *European Journal of Psychology* study, little bumps in the road aren't likely to derail the process of creating new habits. So, forgive yourself and get back to your healthy ways as soon as you can. With a little perseverance, those bad habits will soon be gone for good.

More information: The [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#) has more to help you permanently change eating habits and behaviors.

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