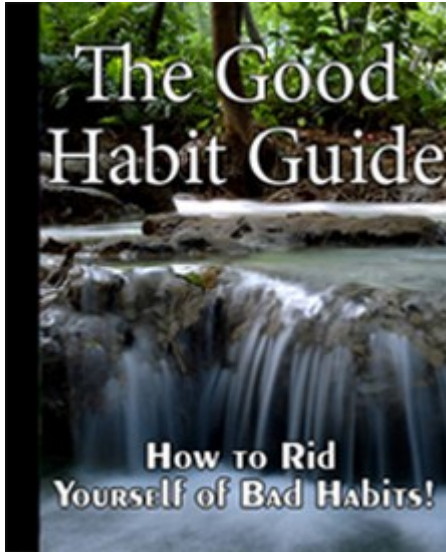


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# Habits and How Are They Created

## **Habits: What They are and How They are Formed**

There is no human being in this world that doesn't have a habit. In fact, no creature lives and thrives without at least a semblance of a habit. Habits are reminders that we learn within our environment and that our environment directly affects the way we act, speak and think. But what are habits and how are they formed?

### **Learning a habit**

A habit, by definition, is any act that is acquired through experiences and is performed on a regular basis, often without thinking. Once a habit is acquired, it becomes almost automatic in nature. It is often exhibited as a mannerism, a quirk, a regular act, a routine or a craving, like smoking.

Psychologist Mortimer Adler, Ph.D., refers to a habit as a 'formed ability', learned over a sustained period of time. He even considers habits as a form of perfection, regardless of whether they are good or bad. His reasoning is that a human infant, during the early stages of his life, has within himself various potentialities and abilities, all of which need to be developed.

As 'raw material', the human infant learns to do, say and think things as a result of his growth, experience or both. As such, he begins to adapt certain habits that he will later exhibit when he's older.

Habits aren't the same as skills, mainly because habits can be broken and forgotten, but skills can't. Learning to speak a certain language, for example, is a skill. No matter how hard you try, it's almost next to impossible to get rid of this skill and become a person who doesn't know the language.

You can probably forget certain words and phrases especially if you become isolated from the language and live in an environment using a different one. However, by simply going back to your origin or encountering your language again regardless of medium, you will remember what your language was and very quickly, regain it.

Another example that distinguishes a habit from a skill can be illustrated by the skill of bicycling. Learning to balance and manipulate

the handlebars is a skill a person learns. So he rides the bike and as part of his habit, he whistles as he does. Once he gets off the bike, he no longer needs to exert effort in maintaining the same balance required by riding a bike and he no longer has to pedal.

However, if he has a habit of whistling when he is in the middle of performing something, such as riding a bike, the same habit may still appear even if he is no longer pedaling. He could be cooking, gardening, taking a shower or washing his car and he would still be whistling. Since whistling is a habit for him, he performs it automatically, without any conscious effort on his part.

Habits are quite interesting subjects and are in fact, a favorite among psychologists because their nature makes them an essential element to learning. When pushed to the extreme, habits can also become disruptive and develop into mental illnesses that often require treatment.

### **How habits are formed**

As mentioned earlier, habits begin as part of a past experience. They can also be formed as part of our acquired skills. An average person, for example, has already learned how to walk, stand up, and sit. His habits can manifest themselves through these simple acquired skills, such as always starting on the same foot when walking or using a certain posture when standing or preferring to cross one leg over the other when sitting.

Experience also plays a major part in the formation of habits. For example, if a person has defective teeth and has been embarrassed about them in the past, he might cover his mouth when speaking or laughing. He keeps repeating this action again and again, until it becomes a habit. Even when he's had his teeth fixed, he might still find himself covering his mouth when laughing from time to time.

### **Emotional aspect of habits**

While the above examples are based mainly on the physical sources of habits, it is also important to remember that habits may also be formed as a result of a sustained emotional response to an event or another emotion. The habit of procrastination, for example, is fairly common and is often the result of emotional immaturity or a lack of self-confidence.

Habits may also be formed as an attempt on self-protection and preservation, often a practical reason why certain habits are reinforced. Automatically checking doors at night or checking the car before driving are common manifestations of formed habits that are created to ensure safety and well being.

## What You Can Do to Change Habits

### **Bad Habits: What You Can Do to Change Them**

Bad habits have been implicated as being the single cause of many broken dreams, lost opportunities and wasted time. People recognize this problem, but saying that changing habits will improve your life is a rather simplistic approach because it's easier said than done. However, it is true that bad habits can be changed provided we understand what they are and how they began in the first place. Recognizing what your bad habits are and how you developed them will be your first step.

### **Habits are learned**

Habits are the result of acquired skills and past experiences. They are often tied to a certain rewarding emotion or event, although it's not uncommon to see habits that are unhealthy and disruptive to both physical and mental health. Habits are formed early, but they are learned behavior, not innate characteristics. Certain acts become habits because they are repeated again and again over an extended period of time. When they are firmly established as a pattern of behavior, these acts become easier and easier to perform. This is when they become habits.

### **Why bad habits are difficult to break**

Change is difficult, one way or another and it is especially true with habits. They are so tough to break that often, most people just give up and give in. Not only that, some bad habits are so deeply ingrained that some people find them comforting. When this happens, people prefer not to change their habits because of the sense of familiarity they offer. Changing them makes some people feel uncomfortable, as if they are leaving their trusted comfort zone. Furthermore, changing a habit makes some people think it will change their character and personality, even if it won't.

## **The habit in your brain**

According to MIT (yes, that's Massachusetts Institute of Technology), if you find it hard to break old habits, blame your neurons. It's because once habits are established, certain changes in the patterns of neural activity in the brain occur. These changes correspond to a certain habit, such as smoking, gambling or drinking coffee in the morning.

The pattern can be reinforced by continuous practice of the habit and will be stored in a region of the brain called the basal ganglia. This is the same region that contributes to procedural learning and the formation of certain habits including addiction.

Once the pattern of a habit has been stored in the brain, it doesn't fade away or disappear, even if a person has successfully stopped a habit. If he encounters an object or event that is associated with that habit, it will act as a stimulus and the pattern can reappear. This probably explains why a reformed smoker will feel a certain pleasure or urge to smoke if he sees an ashtray or a lighter.

### **Old vs. new**

The establishment of patterns in the brain and the associated emotional attachment to certain habits make older habits more difficult to break than new ones. Since old habits are so strongly ingrained that they have become almost automatic, it is always disconcerting to try to break them and continue with other tasks as if nothing happened.

Consider for example, the act of filling a coffeemaker with coffee every morning at 7 o'clock. If you perform this habit daily for many years, it can throw you off a little bit if you happen to sleep in a hotel room and wake up without your kitchen. You will have a feeling that you forgot to do something or that something just isn't right.

You overcome this, of course, but only if you know that everything will go back to normal. You only begin to worry when there is no longer an opportunity for you to perform the same habit again. As an extreme example, people who are obsessive compulsive will find it very uncomfortable and annoying if they can't perform certain acts that they are so used to doing.

## **Changing bad habits**

As you can see, it can be quite a challenge to change a bad habit but just because it's difficult doesn't mean it can't be done. By recognizing its nature, how it is formed and what it does to you, you will be able to view a habit, especially a bad one, from a different perspective. When you're able to break it down and understand how you built it into your system, you will be able to break the pattern and overcome the habit.

A bad habit will always be with you, stored in your brain. But if you truly want to improve your life and implement positive change, aim to break them gradually. When you're able to shed them and find a level of comfort without them, then you'll know a bad habit has been broken.

### **Is There Something Stopping You?**

#### **Stuck in the Moment? Is There Something Stopping You?**

Bad habits die hard and when you're stuck in one, it's often easier to just give up fighting altogether and just simply let the habits overcome your efforts. Forget about the concept of failure. As long as you're back in your comfort zone, you're fine. The only problem with this thinking is, you're wrong. You know you have a bad habit and you so desperately want to change it, but you can't seem to get past square one. No matter what you do, you keep slipping and sliding back. So what's stopping you from making a change in your life and seeking improvement?

#### **Is that a stop sign I see?**

You have the desire to change a bad habit, shouldn't that be enough? If only it were that easy. Often, having a strong desire to end a bad habit isn't enough. Why? For one, habits, whether they are good or bad, have a tendency to stick around. They last forever and even when you conquer them, they can remain dormant for many years. If you're not careful, they could creep up on you during a weak moment and then overcome you again.

Second, old habits offer something comforting because of their familiarity. Most of us are afraid to move forward for fear of living a life we know that is safe and exchanging it for a life that is unknown yet exciting. When this happens, we miss out on a great opportunity.

### **I want a bad habit to end now!**

So how can you overcome a bad habit that has a stranglehold on you? Is there something stopping you? If there is, do you know what it is? Here's how you can stop your bad habits and begin changing your life:

### **Find out the root cause of your bad habit.**

Regardless of what habit you might have, it has a cause for existence. Something in your past made you acquire and develop this habit. Was there a painful or embarrassing situation you experienced in the past or did you experience encouragement in order to develop a habit? Did acquiring that habit make you feel good about yourself? Accepted? Loved? Admired? Or does it make you feel guilty, shameful or embarrassed?

Learning about what caused your bad habit will help you understand what's stopping you from achieving your goals. Oftentimes, by targeting a specific cause or reason, you will understand what your real motivation is for nurturing the habit and how you can finally put an end to it.

### **Acknowledge your responsibility.**

Stop blaming your parents or your elder siblings or your friends for your bad habit. This can stop you from moving on. You not only feel more bitter about your present situation, you could also end up hurting people's feelings. As a child, you probably are free of blame for doing things that you didn't volunteer.

As an adult, however, it's a totally different story. You are an adult who is responsible for everything you do and say. You are probably under no duress to continue with your habit. Once you've acknowledged your own contribution, you can then move on.

### **Accept your fears.**

Fears are beneficial by nature because they are the result of our instincts and reflexes that help protect us in times of danger. However,

fears have a nasty tendency of getting blown out of proportion. A fear can overwhelm and paralyze you even if it's just a tiny thing.

Is it fear that is stopping you? If it is, learn to accept it as your own. Denying you don't have it or that it doesn't exist will only aggravate your emotions. It is there and you know it. You can't make it go away if you don't tell yourself it's even there in the first place. After you have accepted it, learn to let it go. Because you know it to be your own, you have every right to throw your fears away.

### **Make a decision to replace a bad habit with a positive one.**

You can't kill a bad habit but you can stop doing it. Better yet, you can acquire a new one that will replace the bad habit and contribute to making a positive change in your life. Ask yourself, "What do I want changed in my life? How badly do I want it? What am I willing to do to get it? What can I look forward to if I make that change?" The answers to these questions should be reasons enough to take action.

When you have made that decision, you should be able to feel a strong compulsion to take steps in the right direction. You alone can make that move, no one else. Now that you have the incentive to change your bad habits and create good ones, there should be no stopping you this time.

## Regular Habits People Create

### **Are You Guilty? Regular Bad Habits People Create**

Do you have a bad habit? You probably do. In fact, every person on this planet has a bad habit or at least, will develop one at some point in life. Habits are created because of the performance of certain acts in a regular manner. When the mind and body become accustomed to it, these habits become well established and as such, are difficult to break.

Usually, habits are harmless and can even be productive, because they pave the way toward learning. It is only when they become counter productive and affect a person's development and his contribution to his environment that habits need to be changed. Are you guilty of a bad habit? Here are the most common regular habits that people create:

## **Procrastination**

Procrastination is one of the most popular regular habits that people develop. It is also one of the most damaging, although most of the effects are felt at a later stage. People with the habit of procrastination tend to avoid certain tasks, either because these tasks are too difficult, too easy or just simply uncomfortable. Sometimes, when the habit is so well established, avoidance becomes automatic, regardless of the level of difficulty of the task. The result? Wasted time and lost opportunities.

## **Negative thinking**

Negative thinking often becomes a regular habit in people who have had experiences that were difficult or painful. Often, there is a foreboding sense of failure or doom among people who have a negative attitude. They tend to view and treat things as if they are worthless, unsuccessful and a total waste of time, regardless of their real value. People who have developed the habit of negative thinking often find it difficult to see the good points and would rather dwell on the negative aspects.

## **Impulsiveness**

Another regular habit that can be costly is impulsiveness, often found in people who haven't been able to develop a good sense of maturity and acceptance. It is difficult for them to learn to stand back, take a moment to think and decide and then take action. For them, the first thought that comes to mind is often the best choice so they carry out this thought, unmindful of the consequences.

## **Complacency**

Complacency is often characterized by submissiveness, the tendency to stand back and be content. People who are complacent tend to be self-satisfied with themselves and their present condition, never venturing out to see what else their environment can offer them. Complacent individuals are the complete opposite of go-getters. They tend to dislike change and would rather stay within the boundaries of their comfort zones.

## **Implementing false limits**

People who are afraid to go beyond what they have established to be true and effective tend to implement false limits upon themselves. This habit limits their perspective of things and makes them refuse to accept certain truths and take advantage of certain opportunities. In their minds, it's often difficult to go beyond these boundaries and exert more effort because, as they often believe, it's just not done. They think that whatever effort they give will be ineffective and unsafe.

## **Unhealthy physical habits**

Certain habits affect health in a negative way, such as smoking, drinking and excessive eating. These habits may be developed early in life (such as overeating) or they may be acquired later (such as smoking, drinking or taking drugs). They become a problem when they turn into an addiction or begin to threaten their physical health. Habits such as these may or may not be accompanied by an emotional cause or attachment but they become so well established that they often become one of the most difficult to break. We will discuss some of these in upcoming chapters.

## Tripping the Trigger

### **Get Rid of Bad Habits Once and For All by Tripping the Trigger**

Accept it: most people have bad habits. At the most, these bad habits aren't recognized and the individual isn't even aware that he or she has one. However, people can eliminate those bad habits, whether they are aware of them or not.

#### **Here's how:**

1. Identify your bad habit

It's true that some people may not be aware of their bad habits. But this isn't a good excuse for not changing bad habits. They only realize that they have to eliminate bad habits when they are destructive.

The point here is that changing bad habits isn't as simple as 1-2-3. One of the greatest factors that need to be considered is one's

full awareness of his bad habit. The logic is simple: How can you eliminate something you aren't aware of? And this doesn't necessarily mean simply identifying the bad habit per se. This includes identifying the negative sides of the habit in general. Once identified, things will be clear in your mind and you will be able to understand why such activities are classified as bad habits.

## 2. Identify the culprit

Experts say that bad habits don't happen overnight. Like anything else, there must be some reasons or factors that trigger the situation. Hence, the next step in eliminating bad habit is to identify the culprit. What triggers your bad habit?

Of course, you don't pull your hair for no reason at all, right? Not even smokers like the smell of cigarette smoke. You see, every bad habit has a trigger that sets off anxieties and distresses.

Just think of it this way: In most cases, people who smoke would normally say that smoking aids in muscle relaxation or eases the tension that builds up whenever they are in a tricky situation. These are what you call the triggers or the very things that compel you to be engaged in bad habits.

Simply put: stress is the major culprit. People are engaged in bad habits whenever they are stressed, burned out, anxious, or agitated. Some people may also show signs of boredom or negative emotional spurts.

By simply identifying things that trigger bad habits, it will be easier for you to come up with solutions that will effectively eliminate bad habits.

## 3. Act Now!

What good does it make if after identifying the trigger, you are still remain passive about it? The important thing is that you have to act and make some deliberate changes. It isn't enough that you know the enemy and you still let that enemy bother you.

In order to effect bad habit changes, you need to make changes. For instance, if you know that boredom sparks your nail biting,

instead it would be best if you go out for a walk, chat with some friends, or indulge on things that you find satisfying like eating ice cream.

The main point here is that by simply staying away from things that trigger your bad habits, it will be easier for you to keep yourself away from such activities. The idea is to cut the urge that is building inside every time you are within the influence of those triggers.

#### 4. Replacements

The next step is to find replacements. Of course, you may not immediately break the habit in such a short time. You may even find yourself going back to it over and over again.

Hence, the best way to break the habit is to replace it with a good habit. For example, instead of pulling your hair every time you are in a stressful situation, why not find other things that will release your energy. You may use a rubber ball instead and squeeze it as you try to pass through the stressful situation.

Tripping the trigger and eliminating the culprit in bad habit formation is just a matter of diverting your attention to things that will still provide you satisfaction or relief but in a less troubling manner. In time, you will be surprised at how much you have improved and eliminated the bad habit once and for all.

So when experts say trip the trigger, just try to follow this advice and you will surely find yourself in a much better situation.

## Changing is a Process

### **Here's a Quick Way to Understanding That Changing is a Process**

Some people think that life is permanent, where things will never change and the things that happened today will be the same tomorrow or the day after. What they fail to realize is that nothing is permanent in this world except change. And if you think you can't cope with change, maybe these tips can help you get through.

## **Accept Change as a Reality**

Most people may have pre-conceived ideas of what lies before them, what will happen in the future, and what to expect based on the things that are happening.

Problems take place when a person with pre-conceived, ideas experiences change, whether drastic or anticipated. This is because people who don't accept change as something that is real will have difficulty in adapting. Therefore, it is advisable that change should be accepted as true and evident.

## **Change is a Process**

Change is rooted in the field of psychology, where behavior, mind set, and personal perspectives are taken into consideration.

Experts say that for change to take effect in its most effective manner, the individual must learn and understand that it is a process. Usually, change appears as a three-step process. While others may have different categories on each stage, still, change can be boiled down to three stages.

### **1. Decision making**

The first stage is decision making. Some experts say it is the stage of unfreezing; where pre-conceived ideas or the so-called mindset are taken apart and the individual is compelled to overcome passive actions and be interactive. The greatest action an individual can make is when he makes decisions.

When making decisions, you have to consider several things. To adapt to change, you have to avoid defense mechanisms. In this situation, people who are more defensive often reflect on how they despise change. They don't want to let go of their old ways.

However, when people are ready for change and have decided to accept it, they are more than willing to try new things and are more open to new information.

### **2. Preparation**

To effect change, you have to learn how to prepare for such occurrences. Experts say that things are more bearable if you know

where you're heading. Hence, it is important that you have a clear understanding of your goals and objectives.

To do this, you must have a deeper analysis of what is happening in the present. Analyze the trends and predict possible changes that may take place, say, in two to three years. With this, the transition stage will be easier to deal with because you have programmed or set your mind that these things will happen.

Preparation involves notable attempts to effect change, readiness to engage in such changes in the next few months, or the onset of setting goals.

### 3. Taking actions

Change won't happen if the concerned individual doesn't take action. In this stage, the individual is ready to engage will power and develop a sense of independence. That is because they have finally decided on things, prepared for them, and are now ready to take action. This is where the actual process of change takes place.

For instance, if you want to change the quality of your life, you may start with deciding what actions you have to do to exhibit change. Say, if you want to be a singer to earn more income. Then prepare yourself for the main event. After that, taking action is subject to your readiness to take steps and start applying for singing jobs in different organizations.

Keep in mind that each phase in the process has its own readiness. This will be the primary factor that will motivate you to move to the next level. This goes to show that people can make changes by themselves. All they have to do is to follow these three simple steps in the process of change and see the kind of future that lies ahead. As they say, the future is in your hands.

## Using Meditation and Relaxation

### **Little Known Ways of Using Meditation and Relaxation to Facilitate Habit Changes**

Since its inception, relaxation and meditation has been recognized as important treatment modalities. However, many people have noted that most of these treatment modalities are only used by

professionals. What they don't know is that these can also be used personally and applied on their own.

### **Here's how:**

#### 1. Breathe

Air is one of the most important, maybe even the single most important element that man needs in order to survive. However, many people fail to appreciate breathing.

Experts say that breathing as a means of relaxation can greatly help people not only relieve stressful situations but also to facilitate bad habit changes.

How? It is very simple. With deep breathing exercises, muscle tension, anxiety, and other factors that exhibit unclear or distracted thinking are eliminated. Hence, with a more relaxed condition, it will be easier for you to facilitate bad habit changes.

#### 2. Identify stress

People who are stressed tend to engage in activities that may temporarily relieve them but in reality these things only do more harm than good.

For instance, most tobacco smokers contend that one of the reasons they smoke is to relieve tension or stress. They don't know that smoking can even aggravate the situation by increasing tension and irritability.

By applying some meditative and relaxing activities, such as yoga or self-hypnosis, you can easily identify stress and, thereby, quit smoking. And even if the change process is stressful, the results can be invigorating.

#### 3. Detoxify

And this doesn't mean the usual detoxification that people usually do with their bodies. Detoxifying your mind means using effective measures of eliminating negative situations or concepts.

Successful people say that in order to eliminate bad thoughts, you need to program yourself with good thoughts. This can be done by simply choosing positive thoughts.

Yes, this is a choice. You think positive or think negative. Our mind can't occupy two thoughts at the same time. Hence, if you really want to change your bad habits, it is important that you expect the best. People who fail to change bad habits always complain about the fallacies or mistakes in their program or activities. For those who succeed in eliminating bad habits, they always think of the best and believe that they can change for the better without any trace of bad habits left behind. It goes to that old cliché of the glass being half full or half empty.

#### 4. Engage in self-hypnosis

Sigmund Freud, co-founder of the psychoanalytic school of psychology, said that change doesn't take place unless hypnosis is involved. What he meant is that people can only effect change if their minds are in a relaxed state. Through self-hypnosis, the mind is relieved from anxiety and the whole body is free from stress. Hence, people are more prepared to accept suggestions that facilitate bad habit changes.

Some people say that self-hypnosis may also resemble that of counseling because suggestions take place. This is not the case. Experts say that even if suggestions take place in both situations, the ability of the mind to accept things in every respect is more evident and effective when the mind isn't in its conscious state. That is because when the mind is in its conscious state, it tends to be logical and reasonable.

#### 5. Quantify optimism and positive thoughts

If you think you can't simply switch from negative thoughts to positive thoughts because it has always been like that, think again. The idea is to quantify the switches that you do in order to see how effective this process can be.

For instance, every time you have negative thoughts, immediately switch to positive. Then, count every time you do this. In time, you will be amazed at the results. Little by little, the numbers will decrease.

So where do these pointers lead you? All of these things boil down to the fact that changing habits isn't just a process but more of a psychoanalytical activity where the mind is the primary motivator. Experts say that people just have to change the way they perceive things and develop a sense of acceptance to things that will lead them to a better life.

Everything happens not by chance but because people make choices. Everyone has a choice and right choices always take place in a relaxed, positive mind.

