



Change your bad habits for good

By Amanda N. Wegner

Hit the 'net, Google "change bad habits" and you'll find pages upon pages of tip lists and how-tos on the topic.

Sure, all those suggestions might come from "experts" offering two-step to 20-step programs. But in truth, how you achieve the change is more a personal matter than the web reveals.

Here, our experts share what you need to get started on the path to change bad habits for good.

Start with your authentic self.

"Make sure this is something you really desire," says Judy Collins, JD, PCC, owner, Collins Coaching, LLC.

If you're seeking a change out of fear or because someone (a friend, a spouse, even an "expert," such as a physician) has made you feel that you are not OK the way you are, or something bad happens, that is not fair motivation for change. Why? Because as soon as fear or external pressure lessens, the motivation goes away.

"The real motivation has to be desire [for change] from your deepest, most authentic self. It's my perspective that the path to happiness starts there. That way, it will be there to sustain you," she says.

As such, Collins suggests starting your journey of change with deep reflection.



Judy Collins
Collins Coaching, LLC

Make a plan that works ... for you.

The "cold turkey" strategy might work for some (OK, very few, actually), "but for most people," says Collins, "a gentler, less deprivational strategy is better."

To establish a strategy, we need to address all parts of the brain, says Mary Kay Aide, MS, PCC, owner, This Is Your Life Coaching, LLC.

Take the example of giving up coffee. The thinking part of the brain realizes, for a variety of personal reasons, that coffee isn't a good choice. But the feeling part of the brain tells us it makes us feel better and wakes us up in the morning.

Then there are the base instincts. A bad habit is typically something that feels safe, comfortable and routine. It feels normal. With the coffee example, what else can feel normal and safe? Does it need to be something warm? Something that wakes you up? Or something else?

"It's got to be replaced with something pleasurable and that feels comfortable, as well as making good sense," says Aide.

In other words, seek out better alternatives.

"It's really important to develop strategies that allow you to do things you still really want to do," says Collins. "Otherwise, the process of change will feel painful, and it'll be really hard to do beyond a few days."



Mary Kay Aide
This Is Your Life Coaching, LLC

Get creative, not down.

Don't assume your strategies or alternatives are limited.

"Humans are incredibly creative beings," says Collins. "Start with the assumption that there's no right or wrong. There are almost always more choices than you think you have."

And don't let missteps ruin your path to change.

"The way I like to think of it, this is all an experiment," says Aide. "Try new things and if one day it doesn't work, try another tactic."

Use positive self-talk.

There's a growing body of new research that demonstrates the power of positive self-talk.

"If you use positive affirmations at the same time each day for 30 days, it rewires the brain to do and think something new," says Aide, referring to a recent article she read.

She adds: "If you're approaching your change from a positive place, you're more likely to do better and make lasting change."

Don't limit your time to change.

There are all sorts of "timelines" on how long — 21 days, 30 days, 42 days — it takes to change a habit. But the truth is, it should take as long as you need it to in order to last.

"There's no magic timeline," says Collins. "Your change should take as long as you need it to take."



Freelance writer and editor Amanda Wegner, amandawegner.com, once gave up Starbucks tall, no-whip Mocha Frappuccinos. But only for 29 days.