

Daily Activities to Help Change Habits

"I should change, but I've tried and failed." Does this sound familiar? Often, changing habits does seem insurmountable. Many of us simply don't have enough motivation to change our habits - all of our bad habits - in a way that would truly affect our health. We cling to them because we see them as rewards.

But your habits determine your health. Below is a strategy and focus on daily activities to help you change and eliminate bad habits.

It Takes 21 Days to Break a Bad Habit

To begin with, choose one unhealthy habit you wish to eliminate or change. Or, choose a healthy habit you want to adopt as part of your behavior. If it is a habit to eliminate, you may wish to go "cold turkey" or have a gradual tapering off. Caution: If it is a drug or chemical habit you are planning on eliminating, be sure to obtain an expert's opinion as to whether you need to taper off usage as opposed to quitting cold turkey.

Now that you have decided which unhealthy habit to eliminate, or new habit to adopt, decide on the date you will begin your behavior change. Give this date a good deal of thought and then write it down. For example, "On February 15, 2015, I will become a non-smoker."

In order to ensure behavior change, experts agree that it takes a minimum of 21 days to change a behavior. Again, look at the date you are planning on changing your habit. Count ahead 21 days and mark that date down. Now, make a commitment that you will follow your plan for 21 days.

Helpful Suggestions

Your target date has arrived. It is the first day of your 21-day cycle. Here are some helpful suggestions for habit change:

1. *Write down your goal.* There is magic in the written word when it applies to you. Experts recommend stating your goal in positive terms, such as "I want to be lean and physically fit," instead of "I've got to get this flabby body out there huffing and puffing." So, begin with writing down, as a positive goal, the habit you will change.
2. *List your reasons for changing or eliminating your habit.* Writing it down will force you to think out in specific terms what this habit represents in your life and the meaning you believe your life will hold for you upon changing the habit. This will also help with your commitment toward taking positive action.
3. *Find substitute routines.* For example, if you are changing eating habits and you have identified a particularly difficult time of the day when eating habits are poor, create an activity, a new routine for that time.
4. *Talk to yourself.* Tell yourself you're making progress. Remind yourself that you are moving closer to your goal. Talk to yourself throughout the day about how you are going to avoid triggers that can get you off track and make healthy substitutes.

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5. *Recruit helpers for support.* Explain to them why you are making this change. Ask for their support. Their support may be needed encouragement.

6. *Be prepared for people who may sabotage your change.* Be assertive and tell them what they are doing.

Sustaining Motivation

The following are some suggestions to follow each day in order to sustain motivation and determination:

- Review your list of reasons for quitting or changing.
- Create mental pictures of yourself as having already succeeded with your habit change.
- Make affirmations, positive self-statements about your habit change. For example, "I am filled with so much health and vitality now that I exercise four times a week."
- Reward yourself. Make up a list of self-rewards. Reward yourself verbally.
- Remember to take one day at a time. If you do backslide, don't label yourself as having failed. Get out your list or reasons for quitting or changing and begin again.

Fatigue, boredom, depression, stress can all make it difficult to stick with your program. But having a relapse isn't as important as how you deal with the relapse. If you are so devastated by failure that you call your good intentions into question, that will make habit change harder for you. But, if you allow for an occasional relapse and treat it as nothing more than a slight misstep that teaches you something, then you're on the right track.

Follow the suggestions in this article, adopt the more helpful attitude of evaluating your progress and accepting relapses, and you will find yourself reaching many of your goals. You will have achieved true behavior change.

Contact Your EAP

Remember, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is always available to help you or your immediate family members with most-any type of personal, family or work-related issue. If you or a dependent needs help, you can contact your EAP for FREE and CONFIDENTIAL counseling, referrals or information. If you need help, why not call an EAP counselor today? We're here to help you.