

Breaking a habit

Moderate · 15 min to set up · Free

Habits get wired in by repetition, and pleasurable ones are harder to break because dopamine builds cravings. Track what triggers yours, change your surroundings so the habit takes more effort, plan what you'll do in a tempting moment, and swap in something else. The old habit never fully disappears, so expect slips and treat them as information.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A note on your phone to track triggers
- ☐ Someone you can tell
- ☐ One replacement activity you actually like

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Track it for three to five days.** Each time the habit happens, note the time, where you were, who you were with and what you felt right before. Awareness of your patterns and triggers is the first step.
- 2 **Change the setting.** Habits get linked to places and activities. If you stop for a donut on the way to work, take a different route. Keep the tempting thing out of your home. Phone habit? Charge it in another room.
- 3 **Add friction.** Make the healthy choice the easy choice. Log out of the app, delete saved card numbers, or leave the snacks at the store.
- 4 **Pick a replacement.** Swap in something else for the same moment, like exercise, a hobby or time with people. If you eat too much in front of the TV, eat with it off.
- 5 **Rehearse the hard moment.** If you can't avoid a tempting situation, decide ahead of time what you'll do and picture yourself doing it. Write an if-then plan: "If I'm at the party and someone offers a vape, I'll say 'I'm good' and grab a drink."
- 6 **Tell people.** Ask friends, family and co-workers to support you. People's health habits tend to mirror their friends' and family's.
- 7 **Reward small wins.** Give yourself a healthy treat when you reach a small milestone.

Watch out Replacing a habit doesn't erase the old one. Both stay in your brain, so you strengthen the new one by repeating it. Resisting temptation can temporarily drain your willpower, making the next temptation harder. Plan for evenings, stress and tired days, not just good ones.

DAD NOTE *Don't fight the habit head-on. Change the room it lives in.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/mind/habits-that-stick/breaking-a-habit/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: NIH News in Health; SAMHSA; National Institute of Mental Health.