



4 WAYS TO BREAK A HABIT

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Have you ever tried to STOP something that has become a habit, such as biting your nails, smoking, or maybe even comfort eating? If so, you'll know that it's downright difficult. So is it possible to break an entrenched habit? It sure is ... but it takes time, patience and awareness. Read on for the 4 steps that many people find useful in breaking an old habit.

1. **Become aware of your habit** : Notice when you're engaging in the habit that you want to change. Become aware of *when* you do it (people often say this is when they're stressed or bored, or maybe it's when you're in a certain situations or with certain people that you do it). Become aware of *why* you do it (to relieve stress or boredom, or maybe you do it out of fear, or even that you have some thoughts or beliefs about the habit that you haven't questioned). And become aware of *what* you get out of doing the habit (some people feel less stressed or less bored, others say they can avoid uncomfortable feelings).

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2. **Replace your ‘old’ habit with a ‘new’ habit :** It’s really difficult to just STOP doing something – especially if it serves a purpose ... good or bad. Instead, think of an alternative behaviour that you can do every time you notice yourself doing or wanting to do the ‘old’ habit. For example, if you want to change your nail biting behaviour – instead do something else with your hands, maybe doodle, make something, tap out a tune, or use your fingers to count 5 things you can see or 5 things you can hear. If you want to change your smoking behaviour – again, do something else, maybe go for a quick walk, do some deep breathing, or doodle. And if you want to change your comfort eating behaviour – maybe go for a quick walk, choose a healthy snack instead, delay eating something, or have a drink of water instead.
3. **Cut out as many triggers as possible :** If you’re tempted to bite your nails when you’re in a stressful social situation, then try to reduce your stress levels before going into the situation, or enlist the help of someone else to keep you distracted. Or if you’re tempted to smoke when you drink, then reduce your drinking, or only drink in areas where you can’t smoke or with people who don’t smoke. Or if you know you comfort eat when you’re stressed or bored, then try to fill in your days with other activities, or even remove all the tempting comfort foods from the house.
4. **Celebrate your success :** Set yourself some goals, and when you’ve reached them celebrate. Don’t make your goals too hard – instead start with small goals, such as “I won’t bite my nails for a day” or “I won’t comfort eat today”. When you reach that goal, congratulate yourself and celebrate your achievement. Then move on to the next goal, and when you reach that goal, celebrate your achievement. Breaking ‘old’ habits can be a hard slog, so rewarding yourself along the way can make it easier to persist.

Remember that going back to ‘old’ habits is *not* a failure. Understand that you will most likely bite your nails again, smoke again, or comfort eat again ... and when this happens, try not to beat yourself up. Instead, see it as a learning exercise. Ask yourself ‘why’ you did it, and try to problem solve for next time. If you were overly stressed, then build in more ‘stress busters’. If you were bored, then plan more activities. If you thought smoking was the only way of being social, then test that theory out ... can you be social without smoking? Or if the ‘new’ habit you’ve put in place of the ‘old’ habit doesn’t have the same result (for example you don’t feel less stressed or less bored), then think of a new habit that will make you feel less stressed or less bored.

Breaking ‘old’ habits takes time and effort, but mostly it takes perseverance.

If these strategies aren’t enough, and ‘old’ habits are still affecting your life negatively, seeking professional assistance could be useful.

If you would like help in managing your thoughts, feelings or behaviours, please feel free to contact us on 0488 954 195, amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au or [click here](#)

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