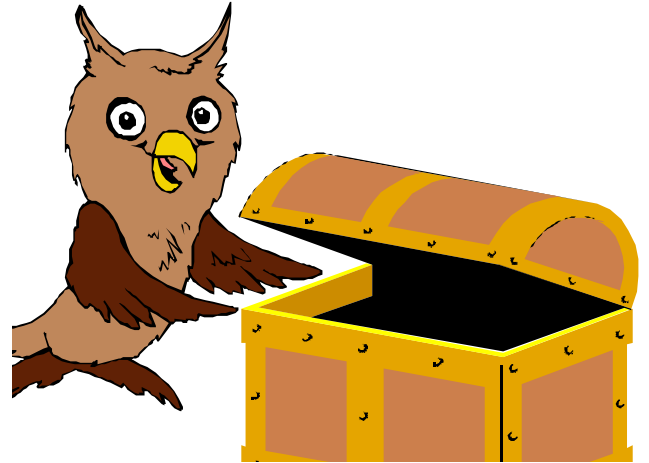


WHEN THE HABIT REMAINS

Have you ever tried to break an old habit (like quitting smoking or losing weight) but found yourself reverting to old habits when things get tough? And you know you did not really want that cigarette or piece of chocolate in the first place. We all know someone who can decide to break an old habit. And, somehow, they just do. Here are five simple steps to help you break free of the old habit, and at the same time, find something much better to draw upon instead:



Step 1: *Recognise your triggers:* There are times when you can easily follow the plan, but others when you feel triggered to draw on old habits (such as when you are feeling stressed, anxious, tense, frustrated or upset). It may also be the case that you revert to the old habit when engaging in another activity that has become associated with the old habit you are trying to break (such as drinking and smoking, smoking and coffee, or chocolate and studying). It is therefore worthwhile to recognise when you engage in the old habit, what you typically do with the old habit, what starts it off, what keeps it going and what ultimately stops it.

Step 2: *Identify the underlying purpose being served:* Once you know your own unique set of triggers, you can reflect upon the purpose the old habit serves. If, for instance, you smoke when stressed or studying, it may be that the underlying purpose of your smoking habit is to relax you or help you focus.

Step 3: *Decide upon a healthier alternative:* Once you know the underlying purpose that the old habit serves, you can then identify healthier habits that still serve the underlying purpose. For instance, instead of smoking to relax, you could do some deep breathing. Instead of smoking to focus on your studies, you could play classical music in the background.

Step 4: *DOIT and hook new habit onto existing routine:* Once you have decided upon your healthier alternative, it is simply a matter of recognising when the old habit has been triggered and consciously choosing to engage in the new alternative. With repetition of the new habit, the old habit will fade away and before you know it, you have acquired a new (healthier) habit.

You can speed up this process by hooking the new habit onto something you would typically do without fail. For example, if you decided upon breathing deeply as a means of relaxing yourself, you could hook the deep breathing habit onto waking up (you do that every day, without fail). You could similarly hook the deep breathing habit onto your bedtime routine (after you have completed your normal bedtime routine and you have made sure you are warm and comfortable, you could do some deep breathing before drifting off into sleep).

Step 5: *Tweak as necessary:* If you find that the new alternative does not completely work for you in the way intended, feel free to tweak your new alternative until such time as it does.

At the end of the day, changing old habits are as easy as reflect, decide and do. So, what are you doing, to adopt healthier habits today?