



lifestyle adjustments. Maybe you're healthy as a horse but struggle with shopping, anger, or pornography. These habits can be just as hard to shake as the ones stated above. But why is this the case? Why can't we just read one more self-help book, download a fancy App, or will ourselves to make it all disappear?

The frustrating reality to this problem is that we're trying to put barriers up against our bad habits (AKA dissociating or distancing ourselves), as opposed to running at them head-on. This is where the power of curiosity truly shines.

The Simplest Form of Mindfulness Is Also the Most Effective Most of us are cognitively aware that our bad habits are, well, BAD. The challenge is that our prefrontal cortex (front section of the brain) that is responsible for this awareness is the first to go offline when we get stressed. When this brain center logs off, we start to feel 'numb', give in to our stress, and fall back onto negative habits.

Let's go back to the 3 pillars that form a habit one more time. You experience a trigger. You respond with a behavior. You receive a reward.

Say you're battling the urge to have that fourth slice of pizza. You've already experienced the trigger that's telling you, "Yes, this is a great idea...you'll feel so good after". What if we took a split second here to pause before caving in? What if we were to use curiosity as a tool to disrupt the cycle? Here's what it looks like:

You feel a trigger that spurs temptation. Instead of caving in, you pause for a moment and get curious. Ask yourself... what's going on? Why am I feeling this way?

From here you have two possible routes, both of which are a step in the right direction. The first path is that you still give in to your bad behavior, but with a heightened state of mindfulness. The act of caving in feels much less satisfying. You become consciously aware that the reward is just a guise covering up the reality that you're in an endless loop of going nowhere.

In one of Brewer's studies, a subject involved with smoking admitted that mindful smoking, "smells like stinky cheese, and tastes like chemicals, YUCK!". This paper eventually reveals that mindfulness training may confer benefits greater than those associated with current standard treatments for smoking cessation. No money, drugs, or therapy required.

The second route is when things get really exciting. This is

when you experience the trigger, but you're now inherently aware that this is a poor choice and you take a halt.

This is how you move from knowledge to wisdom. We're all cognitively aware that bad habits aren't good for us. Curiosity bridges the gap to allow us to be mindful of this, even when we're stressed out or 'in the act'.

When you start to implement this curiosity technique into your behaviors, bad habits simply become less enchanting. You start to wise up and realize that you don't need to give in to every trigger that comes your way. An amazing bonus to this mindset is that curiosity in itself is rewarding. Being mindful amidst your stressed-out state will deliver the prize that you were initially seeking from your 'drug' of choice. It may not be as powerful of a hit, but over time, your brain will realize that it's the one you need.

This is a rewarding, sustainable, and life-changing way to think about human behavior. Will it solve all of your problems instantly? Absolutely not. Many addictions are as much physiological as they are psychological. At times, it may be necessary to get professional help. Regardless, this is a powerful tool for initiating an important conversation with yourself. It is one that empowers you to ditch the dissociation and start attacking your bad habits head-on.

Curiosity is the 'bad habit killer' that we've all been desperately searching for. Next time you experience a trigger, take a moment and just be inquisitive. Why are you feeling this way? What's really going on? More often than not, this pause will be enough to alter the trajectory of your bad habits and spur on the adaption of new-and-improved behaviors.

If you're looking for some anecdotal evidence, I can confidently say that the three months since I heard Dr. Brewer's Ted Talk has been some of the best of my entire life. It's not a perfect ride, but rather a continual journey to becoming a better version of myself every day. Each trigger I overcome is another mini-victory, contributing to the collective effect that is transforming my life.

Be curious. It has the power to give you freedom as you've never felt it before.

Don't worry if plan A fails, there are 25 more letters in the alphabet.