



Breaking Bad (Habits): Finding Happiness through Change

Scientific American Editors

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Self-improvement is a lifelong quest. We all have things we'd like to change about ourselves, which is why many people make New Year's resolutions. Yet, research shows that only about 8% of resolution-makers achieve their goals. Making personal change is hard, and making changes to established behavior patterns is harder still – even though the potential reward is great. As the New Year approaches, the editors of Scientific American offer this eBook on breaking bad habits and the ultimate satisfaction of making difficult life changes. We open with Section 1, "Change Is in the Mind," which looks at how our thought processes can either help or hinder these efforts. Elaine Fox writes in "The Essence of Optimism" that negative thinking causes us undue stress and that by reversing this habit, we could beat depression, anxiety and substance use disorders. Another story by Emily Anthes, "Six Ways to Boost Brainpower," informs that the adult brain is far more malleable than we once thought, putting to bed the idea of being 'too old to change,' and gives practical advice on improving the brain's performance. In Section 2, "Mastering Good Habits," a story by Wray Herbert titled "The Willpower Paradox" addresses the contradictory notion that if we keep ourselves open to failing instead of willing ourselves not to fail, we are more likely to succeed. The next two sections focus on procrastination and self-discipline—two sides of the same coin. While certain personality traits like impulsiveness and low self-esteem can lead people to put things off, we can all break the habit, says Trisha Gura in "I'll Do It Tomorrow." Section 5 tackles "Mindfulness" and how being fully present in the moment can make us happier. It includes one of our most popular articles on the topic: "Being in the Now" by Amishi P. Jha. Section 6 discusses tips for self-improvement, many of which involve focusing on the present. Finally, in Section 7, we close with a discussion of those elusive New Year's resolutions and make lasting personal change, whether that involves cutting back on drinking and smoking, losing and keep off weight, exercising more or keeping the romance alive with your partner or spouse. We hope that this eBook will not only help you keep your New Year's resolutions, but also master new habits to form the foundation of a new and happier "you."

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