



Hey Think your Health friends,

Welcome to the fourth issue of the THINK YOUR HEALTH newsletter. My goal is to send a weekly email straight into your inbox packed with snippets of health information and other items of interest.

The other day I caught myself eating popcorn on the sofa. Well, that does not sound that bad. Right?

The problem was I nearly ate the whole packet of popcorn. Munching, munching away while staring at the TV.

How did this happen?

Why do we do this even when we know subconsciously what we are doing is a **bad thing**.

Most of the time a bad habit, as described above is caused by stress or boredom. A bad habit is a behavior or a pattern of behavior which is undesirable. Let's look at the definition of a habit per Wikipedia: "A habit is the process by which behavior, through regular repetition, becomes automatic or habitual." That would mean like good habits, bad habits become habitual if you repeat them long enough.

Just a reminder of the habit loop described in previous a newsletter. This is a loop which consists of 3 elements: **cue, routine and reward**. (Charles Duhigg)

Let's breakdown the bad habit:

The cue for this bad habit was the sitting on the sofa and looking at TV. The question to ask would be **why we follow through with bad habits** knowing very well that they are bad for oneself.

Bad habits like good habits and there to provide some sort of benefit. You are asking yourself how that can be. Well I was on the sofa looking at TV trying to relax i.e. to reduce stress and deal with boredom. Munching popcorn while looking at TV is a way to turn off the events of a busy day and relax. Both eating and looking at TV can increase a neurotransmitter in your brain (dopamine)- a feel good chemical. The problem is if this is repeated, the repeated behavior eventually becomes a habit.

Now how can one go about breaking this habit?

First **recognize** what the trigger is and if possible, trying to **eliminate** the trigger. In this case the TV and sitting on the sofa. Possibilities could be hiding the remote, timer on the TV screen, moving the TV into another room, changing the viewing angle. These might be too difficult or cumbersome.

Secondly a bad habit can be **substituted** for a good habit. Instead of munching or eating something bad, how about eating sliced apples, blueberries, a cup of Greek yogurt instead.

Breaking bad habits do not happen overnight.

It will take time and effort.

The first step would be recognizing there is a problem. **Self-awareness** is key and the first stepping stone to success. Once awareness has been established, recognizing the neurological habit loop and finding appropriate alternative behaviors for routines as well as tackling the cues to a habit would be the follow up steps.

The only way you can try to **avoid cues** is knowing what your cues are in the first place. So if you drink alcohol from a bar you will have to consciously walk a different route when walking by. If you smoke hide all traces of the habit such as ashtrays, lighters. If ice cream is your vice, when shopping avoid the dessert aisle and do not buy candy or other treats to avoid temptation at home.

Replace your bad habit with an alternate good habit. You cannot think away a bad habit. The more you say to yourself do not eat chocolate, all your brain hears is chocolate. If you consciously grab a healthy snack (fruits), it can satisfy your sweet tooth and be a healthy alternative. Your brain through repeated cycles of this conscious behavior can make this new habit stick. According to James Clear, the author of [Atomic Habits](#) it takes at least 66 days for a habit to stick.

Quote of the week:

And once you understand that habits can change, you have the freedom and the responsibility to remake them.

-Charles Duhigg

My favorite things:

I am re-reading make time so I am highlighting this book once again.

The book I mentioned above is indeed one of my favorite books. It focuses on a framework which are four steps to be repeated daily so that you can **MAKE TIME** in your day. In this way you can pursue the one thing which you need to get done that day.

How MAKE TIME works according to the authors:

1. **Highlight:** prioritize one activity and spend dedicated time on what matters most for you.
2. **Laser:** Be laser focused. Tactics are described and presented to beat and overcome all kinds of distractions.
3. **Energize:** different strategies are discussed to recharge your brain and your body.

4. **Reflect.** Evaluate at the end of the day, on what can be improved and what can be dropped.

Make time is written by Jake Knapp and John Zeratsky.

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