

## FINDING IT HARD TO BREAK A BAD HABIT?

### BRAIN SCIENCE EXPLAINS WHY BREAKING BAD HABITS IS HARD



#### Bad Habits & Science

Everyone has bad habits, and even celebrities and accomplished individuals are not immune to them. However, the desire for self-improvement is part of human nature, and many people want to change their unwanted habits. Why is it so challenging to break bad habits, even when we know they're harmful?

According to Kiana Shelton, a licensed clinical social worker at Mindpath Health, our brains pick up habits and make them automatic, whether good or bad. The brain is trying to be helpful, but it doesn't differentiate between good or bad, just how often the pattern is used. Shelton explains that many of our habits are formed **unconsciously** and may even be a coping mechanism to handle or avoid something unpleasant.

Habit expert Jacinta M. Jiménez, vice president of coaching innovation at BetterUp, believes that habits, even less-than-desirable ones that people want to break or change, serve a purpose. Rather than categorizing habits as "good" or "bad," she encourages people to consider if they're helpful, neutral, or unwanted. Jiménez explains that we learn habits through rewards-based learning, where there's a trigger, a behavior, and a reward. For example, when we feel stressed, we may eat ice cream, which makes us feel better, and our brains receive a pleasure signal through **dopamine**. This cycle is reinforcing, and changing a routine can be a big shock because we're not wired to tolerate uncertainty very well.

According to Shelton, breaking a habit takes an average of 30 to 60 days, and forming a new habit takes an average of 66 days, but individual timeframes vary widely. To change a habit, it's essential to be consistent and self-aware. Jiménez emphasizes that people must identify why they want to change a habit before taking action. Having a clear and personal "why" behind behavior change creates **intrinsic** motivation and provides a foundation when faced with setbacks along the way.

#### "seven tips for breaking bad habits"

Experts offer the following seven tips for breaking bad habits:

1. Pinpoint the habit trigger.
2. Identify why you want to change the habit.
3. Write your "why" on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you can see it.
4. Start small.
5. Get support.
6. Give yourself grace.
7. Reward yourself.

Changing a habit is a challenging but rewarding process that requires self-reflection, motivation, and **consistency**. By understanding the science behind habits and following these tips, anyone can break an unwanted habit and create positive, long-lasting change.

# Lesson 47: Brain Science Explains Why Breaking Bad Habits Is Hard

**Part 1: Comprehension - Read and summarize the article thinking of who, what, when, where & why.**

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## **Part 2: True or False Questions**

- a) True or False - Our brains make habits automatic, regardless of whether they are good or bad. T/F
  
- b) True or False - Jacinta M. Jiménez categorizes habits as either "good" or "bad." T/F
  
- c) True or False - Breaking a habit takes an average of 66 days. T/F
  
- d) True or False - Not everyone can break habits. T/F

## **Part 3a: Guess the meaning of unknown vocabulary/phrases.**

- a) "Unconsciously" \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- b) "Dopamine" \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- c) "Intrinsic" \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- d) "Consistency" \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Part 3b: Vocabulary in Use - Write an example sentence using the words from 3a.**

- a) Unconsciously:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- b) Dopamine:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- c) Intrinsic:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- d) Consistency:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Lesson 47: Brain Science Explains Why Breaking Bad Habits Is Hard

## Part 5: Talking Points

1. What are some of your good and bad habits, and how did you develop them?
2. Why do you think some habits are harder to break than others?
3. Do you agree with Jacinta M. Jiménez's view that habits serve a purpose, even if they're unwanted or harmful? Why or why not?
4. What strategies have you used in the past to break a bad habit, and did they work?
5. Do you think it's important to have a clear "why" when trying to change a habit? Why or why not?
6. How do you think culture and society influence our habits, both good and bad?
7. What are some bad habits your friend or partner has?
8. What role do you think technology plays in shaping our habits, both positively and negatively?
9. How can social support from friends, family, and colleagues help in breaking a bad habit? Give examples.
10. What are some good habits you would like to create in the future?

## Part 6: Role play Scenarios

### **1. Breaking a Bad Habit:**

A and B are friends. A has a bad habit of staying up late watching TV and wants to break it. B offers support and encouragement.

### **2. Identifying Habit Triggers:**

A is trying to break a bad habit of smoking. B is a therapist who helps A identify the triggers that lead to smoking and suggests ways to avoid them.

### **3. Rewarding Yourself:**

A is trying to break a bad habit of procrastination. B is a life coach who suggests ways to reward A for completing tasks on time, such as taking breaks to do something enjoyable or treating oneself to a special activity.

### **4. Identifying Habit Triggers:**

A is trying to break a bad habit of smoking. B is a therapist who helps A identify the triggers that lead to smoking and suggests ways to avoid them.

## Part 7: Writing Activity Present tense - Describe the habits that you have, both good and bad.

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## Part 8: Critical Thinking - Habits

In groups complete the table below writing in the 3 best habits and the 3 worst habits a person can do. Then come back as a class and reach a consensus on the best and worst habits.

### Good Habits

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Bad Habits

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

# Lesson 47: Brain Science Explains Why Breaking Bad Habits Is Hard

**Part 9: a) Below are some articles/videos for additional reading, read/watch and see if you can find similar grammar points or vocabulary.**

1. Why are bad habits so hard to break? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ll9f9nqPOTO>
2. The Science Behind Bad Habits and How to Break Them: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-craving-mind/201908/the-science-behind-bad-habits-and-how-break-them>

**Answers:**

## **Part 1: Comprehension**

The main idea of this article is to explore why it is challenging to break bad habits and provide tips on how to do so effectively. The article discusses the science behind habit formation, how habits serve a purpose, and the importance of identifying one's motivation for wanting to change a habit. The article offers seven tips for breaking bad habits, emphasizing the need for self-awareness, consistency, and support. The article was likely written to help individuals who want to break bad habits but struggle to do so, by providing them with actionable advice and insights into the psychology of habit formation.

## **Part 2: True or False**

A: True B: False C: False D: False

**Part 3a: Guess the meaning of unknown vocabulary or phrases.**

### **a) "Unconsciously"**

Answer: In the context of this article, "unconsciously" means without conscious awareness or intention. It refers to habits that are formed automatically, without the person being fully aware that they are engaging in the behavior. According to the article, many habits are formed unconsciously and may even be a coping mechanism to handle or avoid something unpleasant.

### **b) "Dopamine"**

Answer: This is a chemical in the brain that plays a role in pleasure, reward, and motivation. In the article, dopamine is mentioned as a pleasure signal that reinforces certain habits.

### **c) "Intrinsic"**

Answer: This word means doing something for its inherent value or satisfaction rather than external rewards or pressures. In the context of the article, having an intrinsic motivation to change a habit can provide a strong foundation for success.

### **d) "Consistency"**

Answer: This means maintaining a regular and continuous pattern of behavior or action. In the context of the article, being consistent is essential for successfully breaking and forming habits.

**Part 3b: Vocabulary in Use - Write an example sentence using the words from 3a. (examples)**

### **a) Unconsciously:**

She reached for her phone unconsciously, a reflexive action after years of habit.

### **b) Dopamine:**

Winning the game triggered a rush of dopamine, flooding his brain with a sense of pleasure and accomplishment.

### **c) Intrinsic:**

Her intrinsic motivation to learn and explore new topics drove her to excel in her studies.

### **d) Consistency:**

Consistency in practicing a musical instrument is essential for skill improvement.

## **Part 7: Writing (example)**

I've cultivated a combination of both positive and negative habits. One of my commendable habits is my commitment to rising early, usually at 6 AM, which grants me an extra dose of productivity and a well-organized start to my day. However, I must admit to a detrimental habit – smoking, which I am actively working to overcome due to its known health risks. Additionally, I occasionally drink a little alcohol during social events, as I recognize the importance of moderation to avoid compromising my well-being and academic performance. On the brighter side, I maintain a consistent and positive practice of working out every day at 7 AM, contributing to my physical fitness, mental alertness, and stress relief. My aim is to further refine my lifestyle by minimizing the negative habits while enhancing the positive ones as I continue my academic journey.