

10 Things to Do to When Temptation Overtakes You

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1. Make explicit the person you want to be. List your values. What would most matter to you, for example, if you were looking back on your life later on and feeling peace (or regret)?

Shame and feeling bad or guilty can remind us of our values and, by way of internal conflict, tell us something about who we really are at the core. There wouldn't be so much angst and suffering about being a bad person without a sense of having violated an internal code that is part of us. Going against our own values creates shame. Making our values explicit can motivate us in a positive way to align our behavior with who we want to be.

2. Write a list of the reasons you want to stop your habit and post it somewhere visible to you.

Recognizing why you want to do something different, and not continue the behavior, will motivate you and help prevent you from defaulting to an automatic self-deceptive script.

[Values List](#)

3. Tell yourself you are allowed to do something different this time, rather than thinking of it from the perspective of what you're not allowed to do, or what you "should" do, which creates resistance and rebellion.

But what if your reasoning (rationalization) is that you are going through a hard time and need to "indulge" right now in order to feel better?

People justify self-defeating compulsions by telling themselves that they get to do whatever they want because they need to feel better. Update yourself about what you actually want, and that you don't have to give in this time. Looking at it this way is a reminder that what you want is to be in control and that being an escape junkie doesn't make you feel better or help you, or you wouldn't be in turmoil struggling to try to stop.

4. Anticipate how things will play out. Make an accurate prediction about the situations in which you are most likely to surrender to the impulse and have a realistic plan for what to do instead. The strategy here is to identify the obstacles to success, as opposed to envisioning success using wishful thinking and unearned confidence.

Repetitive behaviors and cycles are habits that not only are difficult psychologically to give up, but also are like a paved road or groove in the brain that has been reinforced over time and become instinctual. Counteracting that instinct and creating new neural connections or new habits” requires outsmarting it through expecting and anticipating the urge. Planning while not in the throes of an episode and taking informed preventive action is your best defense.

5. Use the 30-minute rule before acting on an urge.

Practice waiting to introduce a delay between the feeling and acting on your compulsion to seek "relief" or escape.

Notice your state of mind and allow yourself to see that you can tolerate it. It is transient and its power dissipates if you allow that to happen. This is also a way to bargain with yourself before succumbing to the impulse.

During the 30 minutes, read your list of reasons to not reinforce the compulsive cycle. Then do something else that absorbs your attention (reading, watching a video) or physical activity/movement to transition to another frame of mind.

Breathing and visual techniques can also be used at these times to alter your mental state, reduce stress, and increase your resilience to painful states (Huberman, A., 2016).

Recognize that the feeling of craving is the brain in a compensatory dopamine deficit or pain state that results from repeatedly reinforcing excessive dopamine release through overexposure to escape behaviors that trigger high dopamine, and can change your baseline levels (Huberman, A., 2021). The brain seeks equilibrium, but it's even worse than that because pain has a competitive advantage. So for every dopamine spike, there is a subsequent dopamine deficit that causes levels to fall below baseline (Huberman, A., 2021), creating an ongoing cycle of pain and the need for more relief, on top of reinforcing shame and a shame-based identity.

6. Leverage your capacity to dissociate or compartmentalize.

Step outside of your experience to observe and recognize thoughts and states of mind and notice that they are different from the “self” or who you are, as opposed to taking them literally as if they are facts or an accurate assessment of reality/self.

Here the goal is to develop the capacity to tolerate your internal experience, and not be completely overtaken by it, maintaining an “observing ego” that is not confused about what is happening.

7. Recognize shame and shaming thoughts as separate from you, rather than trying to get rid of shame, which is doomed to fail.

Seeing shame for what it is and is not diminishes some of its power, though it will still be painful.

This approach is different from cognitive behavioral approaches that involve challenging one’s beliefs and trying to change or replace them with more adaptive, rational ones. That can be ineffective and backfire for some people, evolving into an internal struggle to defeat shame. Inevitably shame wins, and the reasoning used in the intervention and predictable failure that results is folded into shame, fueling the shame spiral.

8. Remember that you are not defined by where you are at one point in time or one event.

We are all “works in progress” and the neuroplasticity of our brain allows for ongoing growth and change.

9. Grieve the time you lost but then let go and move on from the losses.

You can start at any time regardless of where you are at now or how long it has taken you.

10. Remind yourself that you can use your mind to change your brain.

References:

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