

MtM Meditation Series
Curiosity and Stress

Let's start by sitting for a few minutes and just Simply Be (Insight Timer, Scott Langston 1:40 minutes). Immediately followed by 8 minutes of sitting quietly and simply be. So now take a deep and while releasing your breath relax your jaw letting you tongue to lay on the floor of your mouth. Now a second breath and on the out breath relax your shoulders. And the third breath on the out breath relax your body...there is nowhere to go nowhere to be.

This evening will be conducted in two parts:

First how to break bad habits by using curiosity,
and the second half will be about making stress your friend.

PART I. Breaking a bad habit article was provided by Vicki Hobbs. The article referred to a TED talk. We will watch a TED Talk video by Judson Brewer called: "A Simple way to Break a Bad Habit" (9 minutes). He is a psychiatrist at University of Massachusetts Medical School, which is where Jon Kabat-Zinn started Mindfulness-bases Stress Reduction (MBSR) program.

A website article that follows below is a summary of Dr. Brewer's TED Talk along with footnotes providing documentation resources.

[Article Resource](#)¹ by [Shana Lebowitz](#)²:
"A psychiatrist says this is the best way to break a bad habit" February 21, 2016.

Whether it's biting your nails or spending hours on Facebook when you should be working, you probably have a bad habit you just can't seem to break.

No matter that you're embarrassed to shake people's hands or that you can't concentrate on work tasks - in the moment, the bad behavior feels so *good*.

Or does it?



Mindfulness training helped people quit smoking.

During a recent [TEDMed Talk](#)³, Judson Brewer, a psychiatrist at University of Massachusetts Medical School, proposed that the key to breaking a bad habit is **mindfulness** - specifically, focusing on how the habit really makes you feel.

¹ Article: <https://amp.businessinsider.com/psychiatrist-mindfulness-is-the-best-way-to-break-a-bad-habit-2016-2>

² Author: <http://www.businessinsider.com/author/shana-lebowitz>

Brewer cited [a study](#)⁴ in which he and his colleagues found that mindfulness training could help people quit smoking. According to Brewer, the majority of participants in the study had already tried and failed to quit smoking about six times.

Instead of forcing the smokers to quit, the researchers gave them complete permission to continue - but the participants were asked to be mindful about how smoking made them feel. For example, they were told to smell the cigarette and think about what it smelled like, then take a drag of the cigarette and notice what it tasted like.

Judson quoted one participant, who said smoking "smells like stinky cheese and tastes like chemicals, YUCK!"

The researchers compared the mindful smokers to another group of smokers who went through pretty standard training called Freedom From Smoking. As it turns out, mindfulness was twice as effective at helping people quit.

Judson explained that the same principle could apply to quitting any bad habit, from overeating to texting while driving.

So why does mindfulness seem to work where other quitting strategies don't?

Judson said it's because when you try to change your behavior, you're exercising cognitive control, which is related to activity in a part of the brain called the prefrontal cortex.

But when you're stressed or tired - which is when bad habits usually rear their ugly heads - the prefrontal cortex basically shuts off. So telling yourself, "Smoking is bad for me" has basically no effect.

Mindfulness, on the other hand, helps you observe your cravings and your behavior up close, without getting sucked into them.

"This is what mindfulness is all about," Judson said. "Seeing really clearly what we get when we get caught up in our behaviors, becoming disenchanted on a visceral level and from this disenchanted stance, naturally letting go."

Presumably, you could employ this same strategy when you're trying to reduce the time you spend on Facebook, for example. Don't tell yourself to close the app - that takes too much self-control that you might not have when you're stressed out at the end of a long workday.

Instead, focus on the way you feel while you're scrolling through friends' updates: Annoyed? Bored? Once you get in touch with those emotions instead of operating on autopilot, you might

³ TED Talk https://www.ted.com/talks/judson_brewer_a_simple_way_to_break_a_bad_habit

⁴ Quit Smoking Study: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3191261/>

realize that you aren't really getting much out of the behavior. And over time, that disenchantment might help you quit the habit for good.

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PART II. The TED Talk video by Dr Brewer called: “A Simple way to Break a Bad Habit” lead into a follow-up TED Talk video that is all about how to make stress your friend.

Rather using mindfulness as a method of avoiding or minimizing stressful situations, you can use stressful situations assist your healthy; that is, once you realize the benefits a good attitude towards stress has healthful rewards.

So here’s the TED Talk video⁵ by Psychologist Kelly McGonigal, “How to Make Stress your Friend” (14 minutes)

“Stress. It makes your heart pound, your breathing quicken and your forehead sweat. But while stress has been made into a public health enemy, new research suggests that stress may only be bad for you if you believe that to be the case. Psychologist Kelly McGonigal urges us to see stress as a positive, and introduces us to an unsung mechanism for stress reduction: reaching out to others.”

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We will close this session with a “Heart Connection Meditation” by Singhashri (Insight Timer 22:13minutes). Focus on having a mindful attitude of curiosity and interest.

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This session is also provided as a PDF file: <http://leafsfoundation.org/projects>. Going to the website and opening the “Curiosity & Stress” PDF file you can click on live web links rather than typing longhand the footnoted URL addresses.

⁵ Video: https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend