

Wanting To Stop Unhealthy Habits

Jena and Daniel had similar problems. They both had habits that were bad for their health, and they couldn't stop. Jena ate too much junk food, like chips, candy, and cupcakes. Daniel smoked cigarettes. They both had cravings, which means they wanted something very much and couldn't stop thinking about it. They tried different ways to quit for many years. Finally, they found a method called mindfulness training. Research shows that this method is more effective than other common approaches, and thousands of people have used it to stop their unhealthy habits.

Other methods didn't work.

In the past, other methods did not work for them. Doctors and health experts often suggest using willpower, or simply saying "no" to a bad habit. For example, when Jena wanted to open a bag of chips, she tried to tell herself "no," but it was too difficult. She felt sad and thought she was weak, which is a common feeling for many people. Another suggestion for Daniel was to avoid the places and people he often smoked with. However, Daniel smoked everywhere: in his car, outside his office, and in his living room. He could not avoid all those places. A third method is to change your attention, such as going for a walk or watching videos. But even while doing these activities, Daniel still thought about smoking. He could not get the craving out of his mind.

A new way to quit: Mindfulness

Finally, Daniel and Jena learned about a new and helpful method called mindfulness training. Daniel's advisor told him to do something surprising: he told him to smoke after their appointment. But he also told Daniel to pay close attention while he smoked. The advisor asked: What does the cigarette taste and smell like? How does it feel to breathe the smoke? How do your clothes smell afterward? At the next meeting, Daniel told his advisor that he noticed the cigarettes actually tasted like chemicals and smelled bad. Now, when he wants to smoke, he stops and remembers that unpleasant experience. He knows he can still smoke if he chooses to, but he usually decides not to. After 30 years and over 200,000 cigarettes, Daniel finally quit.

Jena's experience

Just like Daniel, Jena learned to pay close attention to her habit. She used to eat one piece of candy after another until the whole bag was gone, even when she was not hungry. She started mindfulness training by putting just one piece of candy in her mouth and paying attention to how it felt and tasted. She was surprised to find that the candy felt slippery, tasted too sweet, and stuck to her teeth. She realized she did not actually enjoy it because she had always been rushing to eat more. Later, when she saw candy in a store, she began to ask herself how she would feel if she ate it. After a few moments of noticing how she'd feel, she usually left with only healthy food.

Study results

Researchers studied this mindfulness technique and compared it to a popular method called "Freedom From Smoking" (FFS). The study included 88 smokers who wanted to quit. Half had mindfulness training, and half had FFS. Seventeen weeks later, 31% of the smokers who used mindfulness training had quit smoking, but only 6% of those who used the FFS method had quit. These results show that mindfulness can be more powerful than other common methods for breaking a strong habit.

Wanting To Stop Overeating Junk Food, Smoking etc.

Comprehension Exercise

Directions: Write T (true) or F (false) next to each sentence.

- ___ 1. Jena and Daniel like overeating and smoking and did not want to stop.
- ___ 2. This article talks about a method that has been very helpful for people who want to stop doing something unhealthy.
- ___ 3. The “just say no” technique did not help Jena.
- ___ 4. Daniel probably thought his advisor would tell him to stop smoking, but he actually told him to smoke.
- ___ 5. More smokers who used the FFS technique quit smoking than the ones who used the mindfulness training.
- ___ 6. In mindfulness training, we pay attention to how the habit feels when we do it.

Paraphrasing Exercise

Directions: Imagine that you have this conversation with a friend.

You: I just read this interesting article.

Friend: Oh yeah. What did it say?

Write what you would tell your friend. Include as many details as you can.

After you finish writing a first draft, you can re-read the article and revise your draft. However, don't look at the article while you are writing. You can use some of these **key words** in your paraphrase.

Key Words

• Daniel and Jena • junk food • cigarettes • couldn't stop thinking • just say no • stay away from places • do something else • mindfulness training • a study	• pay attention while doing it • piece of candy • slipper, tasted too sweet, stuck to her teeth • at a store • mindfulness technique • freedom from smoking treatment (FFS) • 31% and 6%
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Reflection Exercise

Directions: Write a reflection about the article. Try to write a paragraph with several sentences. In your reflection, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*