

# Why is it so hard to change our habits?

Blog by Coach April Ringler  
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*Elevating Purposeful Women*



We all know what to do to lose weight, quit smoking, or to stop any bad habit or to create a good one. Knowing is definitely not the problem! So, then what is it? Why is it so hard to really change our behavior? The fact is, change is simple but it's not always easy because our habits are engrained behaviors we do unconsciously and without effort or even knowing we're doing them. Of course changing them is hard! But, we can also sabotage our efforts in other ways, like any of the following 8 fallacies:

## 1. Negative motivation.

Sometimes negative emotions like regret, shame, fear, and guilt can lead us to examine ourselves and decide to change. This can look like, "I'm not happy with the way I look or feel. I don't have the energy to play with my kids. I need make some changes." While we may think negative emotions would motivate us to change, and they can help us get started, they are not ideal for creating lasting behavior change.

Studies have consistently shown that the least effective strategies for change were fear and regret. Oftentimes, negative motivation can just perpetuate negative emotions like stress or anxiety. It's hard to convince ourselves we can or deserve to look or feel better if we are motivated by negative emotions like fear or regret. This can make it challenging to push thru or overcome obstacles.

Real change needs a positive platform to launch from; you need positive, self-edifying reasons for taking on the challenge. This can look like, "I *can* be happier, healthier, and feel better about the way I look and feel. It's *possible* for me to create healthier habits, lose some weight, and have more energy so I *can* enjoy playing with my kids." This is acceptable even if it's not 100% true for us, yet. Embracing positive and self-edifying reasons offers some grace for ourselves. If/when we struggle, having some compassion for ourselves and these positive motivations can be uplifting and encouraging. They can inspire us to not give up, rather than the negative emotions that would only reinforce our perceived failure.

## 2. Cognitive distortion.

We tend to overthink behavior change and it's easy to take on an all-or-nothing mindset. This can look like, "I'm going to stop smoking and if I can't even do that, I guess I'm just not meant to live a healthier life." The problem with this is we're setting ourselves up for a no-win situation. Chances are the motivation we start with will subside. So we may go weeks without a cigarette and one stressful day or circumstance has us smoking, so we just throw in the towel? We say, "what's the point?" and just continue smoking?

Instead, I encourage us to celebrate the progress we made and forgive ourselves for smoking this time. Showing some grace and self-compassion, acknowledging we're only human but knowing that it's still possible to break the bad habit, if we keep trying. One setback does not need to be a deal breaker.

## 3. Unrealistic expectations.

There's a saying about eating an elephant can be overwhelming. Some people may look at the huge task and actually get discouraged because it's impossible.. but it's not actually expected that it has to be all done, all at once. That's why we just start somewhere and take it, one bite at a time.

Habit change is no different, we must set realistic expectations and not get overwhelmed. Instead of big and vague goals, we must start somewhere, with small and specific actions. Rather than, "I'm going to start exercising," try "I'm going to get up 30 minutes early so I can walk on the treadmill before I get ready for work." Establishing specific goals is essential to success. How do we hit a target we don't aim for? But it also helps us take specific action steps towards behavior change, which is one forkful in eating the giant elephant. It's by taking the tiny bites of action steps, over time, that all add up to us accomplishing the goal.

*Keep going...  
Never give up!*