Kicking a Bad Habit

Old habits die hard... or do they? Maybe your habit is eating a candy bar every day at 3pm, or hitting the snooze button every morning. Maybe it’s your habit of staying up until 2am on chatroulette.

Check out this video from Charles Duhigg, a Harvard Business School graudate and NY Times reporter on the Power of Habit:

http://www.amazon.com/gp/mpd/permalink/mT09LN0NJGDSX/ref=ent_fb_link

According to Duhigg, habits are completed via a three-step process
Cue (a time/location/person/etc.) → Routine (the behavior)→ Reward.

Our brains are hardwired to convert repeated behaviors into automatic routines, and BAM a habit forms. This allows your brain to work “less” and then you can devote mental activity to other activities. For example, when you are driving you can easily be having a conversation with a friend on the phone. Your brain is in pseudo sleep mode.

So when the cues to your bad habits are changed, (you spend the night away from home and can’t hit your snooze) the pattern of cue-routine-reward is broken. If this happens enough times you can “break” a habit or replace it with a better one.

Cues can be pretty much anything. The key to breaking a bad habit is to identify the reward you’re fulfilling by going through the routine. So let’s say your habit is eating a huge snack before bedtime. The clock strikes 9 o’clock (your cue), and so you make your way to the pantry and start munching on a big bag of chips (the routine), and 15 minutes later you’re feeling good (the reward).

**Break it down:** Your reward is likely the endorphin release that eating the chips creates; maybe you’ve had a long stressful day. So to change the habit, you need to recognize the cue (it’s 9pm) and change the routine! How about at 9pm you Skype your friend and chat for 15 minutes (changed the routine), but you still get an endorphin release from the pleasant conversation (the reward). Remember, habits take awhile to change – plan to stick this out for at least a month!

Learn more about this at the sources listed below:

Sources:

http://www.npr.org/2012/03/05/147192599/habits-how-they-form-and-how-to-break-them