

If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad

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If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad...so goes the lyric.

But as adults, we know that's not always true. Not everything that makes us happy is actually good for us.

But the key to establishing good, healthy habits and breaking bad habits may be the flip side of this coin. We are most likely to do things that make us happy, so how can we things that are good for us also make us happy?

The item that I find myself stressing in my patient's treatment plans the most lately is SUSTAINABILITY which is why I'm so focused right now on how to help people make better habits and quit their bad habits. Talking about happiness may make it seem like I'm saying it's easy, but that's certainly not the case. Research has indicated that it may take three weeks or more to make a new habit and it can be hard to stick with something for those three weeks. And then if you've done something for three weeks and it still feels really hard, what then?

It's really important to remember that habits are not always the same as goals. Some goals are to establish new habits or break bad ones - such as walking 3x/week or quitting smoking. These are great goals. But often with goals, you checked them off your list when you have accomplished them. Other goals, such as lowering your blood glucose or cholesterol, losing a few pounds or better managing a health condition aren't the type to be checked off a list, though. They may require ongoing lifestyle changes (including multiple healthy habits) to maintain.

I've given the example of my patients with Hashimoto's thyroiditis, an autoimmune condition in which the thyroid gland is often damaged. I have helped some of my patients achieve a type of remission, where the autoimmune condition is undetected and their thyroid is stable. However, it becomes essential to maintain the lifestyle changes which helped them achieve this state. When I work with patient's on weight issues, I also stress how temporary changes in diet and

exercise usually only create temporary changes in weight and that lasting weight loss often requires significant permanent lifestyle changes.

James Clear, in his book Atomic Habits, calls groups of habits "systems" and says, "you do not rise to the level of your goals, you sink to the level of your systems." I find this very true for health. He also wrote, "what ever our [current] results are, your current system is perfect for delivering them." This is a bit more complex for health issues, but does suggest, quite clearly, that if you want a different outcome, you have



to change your system, that is, your habits.

Mr. Clear does suggest a system for changing your habits. If you want all the details, I suggest you pick up a copy of the book, but the general outline is to make the positive habits you are trying to achieve 1. Obvious, 2. Attractive, 3. Easy and 4. Satisfying. Attractive and easy were the factors which I was thinking of when that song lyric inspired this article. For breaking a bad habit, you invert those rules - make that habit 1. Not Obvious, 2. Not Attractive, 3. Not Easy and 4. Not Satisfying. See the table for an example in each direction.

I'm a very goal-oriented person and love working on my goals and habits, but even I have challenges making new habits stick. I found this framework very helpful and hope that you do, too. If you are having health challenges and trouble making changes for good, I and my colleagues would be happy to help you establish and stick with goals and habits to achieve greater health and happiness. All providers are accepting new patients.

	Positive Habit: Eat More Vegetables	Negative Habit: Smoking (Quitting)
Obvious	Put your veggies on a shelf in the fridge at eye level or when appropriate, on the counter in easy reach	Keep your cigarettes, lighters, matches, and ashtrays out of sight. Keep cessation aids like nicotine gum or patches in sight.
Attractive	Buy veggies you know you like, buy fresh and unblemished veggies, make a dip that you know you love	Change your cigarette brand to something you don't like as well or store your cigarettes in a box with messages to yourself on it about the reasons you are trying to quit, make a rule about something else you have to do before you can smoke
Easy	Buy veggies that are already cut for you or cut them when you get home, pre-roast a panful of veggies and pack them in serving sized containers	Store your cigarettes in an inconvenient location such as the trunk of your car, make a rule that you can only smoke outside, even if it's raining
Satisfying	Find preparation methods and veggies you enjoy and don't force yourself to eat those you don't!	This one can be challenging, because of the physical addiction to nicotine, but patients have reported that changing the brand has helped in this area.



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