



The Psychology of Quitting

The brain is a pattern recognition and construction machine. We are hardwired to stick to the status quo, to take the easier path to be “efficient”.

The brain also likes rewards, motivating us to continue the behaviour we associate with “feeling good”.

So, if we want to change a behaviour, we need to start with changing how we think.

To break a habit, taking the path of least effort will work wonders! Therefore, finding small ways to disrupt the habitual behaviour can have a big impact.

Making changes to your daily routine can be a good start, by doing things at a different time, place, or order.

For example, you would like to quit smoking, and your routine is that you smoke a cigarette when you have your coffee break at work. What else could you do instead?

And while you’re thinking about this change, are you talking yourself out of it in your mind? For example, are you telling yourself things such as smoking helps you:

- ▷ Relax?
- ▷ Focus?
- ▷ Decrease your feelings of distress?
- ▷ Lose weight?
- ▷ Increase your energy?

If you hear yourself saying these things, then you are trying to talk yourself out of the change!

Instead, remind yourself of the reasons you want to quit – what are those?

Sometimes what we are attempting to quit is not habit but an addiction – the more we do it, the more we tell ourselves it feels good, or helps us. But does it?

Let’s consider what it could be costing you:

- ▷ Health
- ▷ Wellbeing
- ▷ Relationships
- ▷ Money
- ▷ Work

However, quitting is TOUGH and can take a little while – which is a common reason why most of us give up or return to our usual patterns.

Engaging your support networks and telling family and friends about your commitment to quitting can help. Remind yourself of the reasons you want to change, and most importantly start small! Going “cold turkey” can be risky.

Take one day at a time.

If you slip up, you might think, “I’ve blown it, I may as well start again”. Instead remind yourself that it was just a slip-up and go back to your normal plan. It helps to know a slip-up doesn’t mean you have failed.

Practice positive self-talk, such as, “I’m a non-smoker”, and “I can quit”. Believing that you can quit can improve your chances of success.

If you would like to speak with a mental health professional about your commitment to quit, you can access your company’s Employee Assistance Provider, BSS Psychology. You can make an appointment by calling 1800 30 30 90, or request a call back via the website bsspsych.com.au.

You can also download the BSS app (search ‘BSS EAP’).



BSS Main Office: 1029 Wellington Street, West Perth WA 6005
Counselling available Australia-wide
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