

● Ask America's Ultimate Experts

Q "Help me break my bad habit!"

Got a behavior you'd like to change? Studies show you can break any habit—all you need is the right game plan. Here, experts reveal the steps to success!

1 Stop binge eating!

Can't resist decadent sweets? Love savory, salty treats? To satisfy the munchies without going overboard, nutrition expert Elaine Magee, M.P.H., R.D., suggests:

Trying the 30-second trick!

Just take a bite of whatever food you're craving and let it sit in your mouth for a count of 30. You'll get to fully relish the texture and flavors—and trick your brain into thinking you've eaten more! Magee, a professor, uses this trick with her students using Hershey's Kisses. No one has ever wanted seconds—and many swallow the chocolate sooner because the flavor gets too intense!



Sipping flavored green tea!

Next time you're looking for a snack, brew a cup of flavored green tea, suggests Magee. The reason: Research shows we often mistake thirst for hunger, so a few sips can turn off cravings. Why flavored green tea?

It's a no-calorie drink that gives you a burst of sweetness to trigger the brain's pleasure center. Even better: Two cups of green tea daily delivers a dose of plant compounds that rev your metabolism by nearly 5%, reports show. Try: Lipton Lemon Ginseng Green Tea or Bigelow Green Tea with Blueberry, both available at grocery stores.

Spooning up more grapefruit!

Eat just one half of this citrus fruit before each meal, and you'll drop nearly four pounds in a month, according to a study. Grapefruit's secret? Researchers explain that it lowers your levels of insulin, helping you dodge the blood-sugar spikes that cause cravings.



2 Quit smoking!

Whether you puff one cigarette or one pack a day, nicotine addiction expert—and former smoker—Terry Martin promises you can kick the habit by:

Having a two-week goal!

To avoid putting off your quit date, choose a day and tell yourself that you only need to last two weeks. A short-term goal automatically seems more manageable, says Martin, making you more likely to stub out your last cigarette. Plus, studies show that severe nicotine cravings ease up—and in some cases stop altogether—after 14 days.

Friending an ex-smoker!

The majority of successful quitters did so with support from former smokers, says Martin. That's why she recommends checking out an online support group. "You'll be put in touch with hundreds of ex-smokers at all stages of quitting," she explains. "And the support is available 24/7." That means you get the advice you need exactly when you need it! Her picks: Forums.about.com/ab-quitsmoking and BecomeAnEx.org.

Reaching for the patch!

Going cold turkey works for less than 20% of smokers trying to quit. One big reason? Nicotine withdrawal symptoms, which can mimic the flu. A solution? Nicotine replacement therapies (NRT). These give a measured dose of nicotine that is reduced over time, easing withdrawal. NRT comes in a number of forms—transdermal patch, gum, lozenges, inhaler and nasal spray—and your doctor can help you decide which is right for you.

Tip!
Aiming for perfection? Don't! A study found that setbacks can actually help get you back on track by causing you to redouble your efforts!



3 Cure yourself of compulsive shopping!

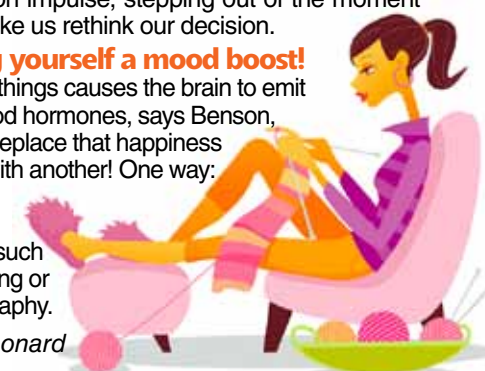
Love to shop—a bit too much? Curb that urge to splurge with this advice from compulsive-buying expert April Lane Benson, Ph.D. She suggests:

Having a shopping buddy!

Make a pact with a shopping buddy to call each other whenever you get that urge to hit the mall, Benson suggests. A study found that when we're acting on impulse, stepping out of the moment can make us rethink our decision.

Giving yourself a mood boost!

Buying things causes the brain to emit feel-good hormones, says Benson, so just replace that happiness boost with another! One way: Learn a new hobby, such as knitting or photography.



—Jennifer Leonard

Our expert panel



Elaine Magee, M.P.H., R.D., known as the Recipe Doctor, is a nutrition expert/writer for WebMD.com. She's written more than 25 books, including *Tell Me What to Eat if I Suffer from Heart Disease*.



About.com's smoking cessation guide **Terry Martin** dishes advice to thousands of Americans on how they can free themselves from nicotine addiction. She smoked for 26 years before quitting for good in 2001.



April Lane Benson, Ph.D., is an expert in the study and treatment of compulsive buying disorder. She's the author of *To Buy or Not to Buy* and *How to Stop* and is a regular guest on CNBC, Fox News and CNN.