



# ATTEMPTS TO MAKE HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE CHOICES OFTEN FAIL WHY? A Challenge from Jen

No Clue!.....Just Kidding. How many times have we tried to lose weight, eat better, get more sleep, and just try to make healthier choices only to lose steam after a week or in some cases, for some people, a day. We have good intentions. Some of us go as far as to track our progress, keeping a journal (which is an excellent discipline), but only to find a few days later we forgot to enter something, we scramble to write our entry on a scrap piece of paper, eventually misplacing the journal entirely, only to have it show up months later as your “grocery list, teachers notes, and "to do" list pad. I might be speaking from experience. So why is it so hard to make a healthy choice a habit? Personally, I think the answer lies in the “why” we are attempting it.

Perhaps your last doctor’s appointment wasn’t that great. He or she feels strongly that you should lose weight for your health, or maybe you are going to a reunion, or wedding and want to lose weight to look better. Maybe you are a smoker and you are trying to quit for your family (extremely good reason), but many times all these reasons fall short. Even trying to quit smoking for your family. You have good intentions but for many if that alone could drive you to succeed it would have and hasn’t. Don’t self-deprecate. You are not weak. You are not lacking discipline. We are just creatures of habit, and habit takes at least 66 days (not 21 as Maxwell Maltz would state). But the actual time line varies for everyone.

So how can you be successful in adopting new healthier habits and/or getting rid of bad ones? It has been suggested by neuroscientists that it is easier to remove an old habit if you have a healthier option taking its place.([study](#)). Habit changing has also been found to be more successful if your intent is stated out loud to a friend or family member. Also try to avoid situations that can be a trigger for your “bad habit” like smoking while at a bar. These are great suggestions but if it were that easy “bad habits” wouldn’t exist. It has been documented that habits that elicit a dopamine response in the brain are the hardest to break. We associate the habit with feeling well ([study](#)). It has also been shown that if you change the way you think about something you can change your behavior towards it.

So here is my take on all this. I think many goals or “healthy habit attempts” fail because we focus on the wrong thing. When trying to lose weight we focus on what the scale reads. When trying to lower cholesterol we focus on the numbers. We may be doing all the right behaviors to achieve the desired results but by focusing on changing our eating habits to lose weight or lower cholesterol I think we sabotage ourselves. If the numbers don’t move or the weight comes off initially only to come back the week later, even though we are still trying to keep the good habits, it can mess with our minds and motivation. If you want to change the behavior you have to change the mind. So here is what I propose. **Don’t focus on the outcome that you wish to achieve by developing good habits. Focus on HOW YOU FEEL!** When you choose a piece of fruit over chips, when you go to bed early without a computer, when you choose to walk to the bank instead of drive, take note to how you physically feel. Your energy, your breathing, focus on not what you are ultimately trying to achieve and I bet you will be successful. Here is my challenge. Instead of picking something you would like to change, let your body and your mind pick what will be successful for you. If it is not your original goal but you feel better it will just set you up for success. So start off by, every day for a week, pick 3 healthier options in a day. Not grabbing the cookie, walking, etc. At the end of the day feel good about your choices, at the end of the week take note as to how you feel. Your entire wellbeing. Once you physically and mentally start feeling better pick one habit and stick with it for 2 months. Whatever it is, that dopamine response will reinforce your desire to keep going. Focus on feeling well...the rest will come.