



A Bad Habit - Opioids

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It's that time of year again! The time of New Year's Resolutions to break bad habits and to embrace change. When it comes to the topic of addiction, it is easy to think, "It's a bad habit, if a person wants to stop, they just need to quit and get on with life". Ah, if only it were that easy. Change is never easy regardless of the type of change one considers.

Fortunately, we are all creatures of habit. From the time we wake up to the time we go to sleep, we follow habits to move ef-



ficiently throughout the day. It would truly be an exhausting day if we were forced to stop and make a conscious decision of everything that needed to be done. "Let's see, shall I brush my teeth today? If I do, when do I need to brush my teeth, before work or when I return home?" I imagine our co-workers are glad we have a habit of brushing our teeth before we wish them a good morning. My point is that habits are part of how we live. The problem arises when we

have formed a habit that is an unhealthy one. When it comes to chemical substances, the habit can form without a conscious decision to develop the habit. For example, a person takes a chemical such as an opioid with the clear intent to treat pain and that's it. Unfortunately, in some cases, it does not stop there. Later, one may wonder, "how did I get to this place in my life?"

Opioids work their magic by attaching to nerve cells throughout the body to block pain messages. The problem comes in when the opioids attach to opioid receptors in the brain's reward center releasing a large dose of the "feel-good" chemical dopamine. Who does not enjoy feeling relaxed and euphoric? Not just a little relaxed and euphoric. I'm talking absence of pain and extremely relaxed and euphoric. What is there not to love about that? Our brain's reward center exists in part to draw our attention to something worth remembering to do again. It is part of sustaining life. Think in terms of the pleasure associated with eating. Our brain's reward center does not distinguish between healthy and unhealthy ways of feeling good. It just feels good. Addiction enters into the picture when the craving for more takes over. Regardless of the personal cost, the person is driven to use and to use more. Such compulsive behavior that consumes one's life is not rational. Brain imaging studies show evidence of changes related to the disease of addiction impacting judgment, decision making, learning, memory, and behavior control.

Our community is experiencing an opioid epidemic following an increase in opioid prescriptions. This epidemic touches every socioeconomic level, race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and education level.



A report released by Duke University sums up the devastating effects of this epidemic with an increase in opioid deaths in Gaston County of over 1,300 percent from 1996 to 2016. It is highly possible that someone reading this may have or have had an addiction to opioids or another substance or have someone close to them who has. If you need help or know someone who does, please let this be your year to take advantage of the support of people who care and resolve to not give up on you or the person you care about.

If you are interested in a career to help change the lives of people struggling with an addiction, Gaston College offers a two year concentration degree in substance abuse. Please contact me if you would like information about this degree at 704.825.6273 or elliott.ann@gaston.edu. Gaston College offers a two-year concentration degree in substance abuse.

To learn more, please visit the sites below.

- www.centeronaddiction.org
- www.partnersbhm.org
- rememberingaustin.org

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New Year's Resolution?

By Brett LaFemina
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Making a lifestyle change can be difficult, and even more difficult to make a habit. Joseph Luciani reports in his U.S. News article¹ that by mid-February 80% of planned New Year's resolutions fail. To help you become one of the 20% that succeeds in their resolutions, let's look at one of the most common behavior change model and some tools to help you through the stages.

In the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change, change is a process and part of that process may include taking steps backward as well as forward. This is referred to as a relapse and isn't considered a failure; rather, it's a chance to reflect on why the relapse occurred and to use the relapse as a chance to regain your motivation.

There are 5 stages in the Transtheoretical Model; precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.

In the precontemplation stage, an individual has no desire to change a certain behavior or habit. They may know they should change, but they have no desire to or, like many, may not know that their behavior is causing them harm. People in this stage benefit from informational pieces, such as PSAs or brochures, teaching them of the risks associated with their behavior and the benefits of change.

In the contemplation stage, an individual understands the need to change a behavior, would like to, but doesn't have plans to begin the process of change just yet.

In the preparation stage, an individual is making moves towards their desired change but hasn't yet begun to actively change. For example, someone may purchase a gym membership or workout clothing but haven't yet performed a workout session.

In the action stage, an individual has begun the process of change and are putting into practice the strategies or behaviors they prepared for in the previous stage. An individual will typically stay in this stage for 6 months, consistently engaging in changing the desired behavior.

In the maintenance stage, an individual has changed their behavior and is now working to make this is a permanent change.

DID YOU MAKE A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION?

The processes of change are tools to help move you through the stages of the Transtheoretical model. In *An Invitation to Health*, Dianne Hales² lists the processes in the following order:

- **Consciousness-raising:** educating yourself on the behavior and suggestions on changing. This can include gaining knowledge of yourself, such as your tendencies or habits.
- **Social liberation:** utilizing alternatives in your environment, such as avoiding certain areas that may trigger you to go back to your behavior or puts you at risk of relapsing.
- **Emotional arousal:** establishing resolve to change. This can be generated from a life-changing event or just a strong internal drive.
- **Self-reevaluation:** visualizing yourself having changed, including the benefits that you'll reap from the change and how you'll feel.

- **Commitment:** understanding that change begins with you, and that you are the one responsible for seeing it through.
- **Rewards:** positive reinforcement through gifts, such as purchasing an item or going to an event once a goal has been achieved.
- **Countering:** replacing a bad behavior with a healthier option. For example, instead of snacking at night you brush your teeth instead.
- **Environment control:** changing your environment to reduce your risk of relapsing, such as stocking your pantry with only healthy snacks.
- **Helping relationships:** utilizing a support system to help encourage you through the change.

Knowing what stage you're in and then choosing one or more processes can help you move to the next stage and decrease your chances of a relapse. However, if you do relapse, just remember that it's not the end of your behavior change and that you can regain your footing and continue on. Sometimes we need to take a step backward to prepare to make leaps forward. Good luck with your resolutions!

1. <https://health.usnews.com/health-news/blogs/eat-run/articles/2015-12-29/why-80-percent-of-new-years-resolutions-fail>
2. *An Invitation to Health*, 10th Edition, Diane Hales. Cengage Learning, ISBN: 978-1-337-10000-7



Meatless Monday

By Kelly Vass, MS, RD, LDN
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Whether you omit your intake of meat on Monday, limit your intake of meat each day or avoid meat every day of the week, eating a more plant based diet has many health benefits. Overweight individuals who follow a vegetarian diet experience greater weight loss compared to those who eat a plant and meat based diet (Melina, Craig, & Levin, 2016). Also, vegetarian diets have been associated with reduced cardiovascular disease risk, type 2 diabetes risk and risk cancers, especially gastrointestinal cancers (Melina, Craig, & Levin, 2016).

Vegetarian or plant based diets come in a variety of types. The most common types of vegetarian diets are as follows:

- **Vegan** diets omit meat, fish, poultry, eggs and dairy products as well as foods that contain these items.
- **Lacto-vegetarian** diets omit meat, fish, poultry and eggs as well as foods that contain these items. Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt, butter and the like) may be consumed.
- **Ovo-vegetarian** diets omit meat, fish, poultry and dairy products. Eggs may be consumed.
- **Lacto-ovo vegetarian** diets omit meat, fish and poultry. Dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt, butter and the like) and eggs may be consumed.
- **Pescatarian** diets omit meat, poultry, eggs and dairy, yet consume fish.
- **Flexitarian** diets consume a plant-based diet yet consume small amounts of meat, fish, poultry, eggs and dairy products.

I would encourage you to prepare homemade Black Bean Burgers (<https://www.southernliving.com/recipes/black-bean-burger-comeback-sauce-recipe>) with Comeback Sauce instead of purchasing the frozen boxed variety of black bean burgers. The effort will be worth the time. I made this recipe using canned black beans instead of soaking and slow cooking the beans. If you want to cut back on the fat, consider using reduced fat mayonnaise, and leaving off the Muenster cheese. Also, I opted to

make six burgers instead of the recipe yield of four. The sauce recipe reminds me of the Come Back Sauce at the Come Back Shack in Boone.

Also, hummus is easier than you may think to prepare. The Spicy Hummus: Quick Chickpea Spread (<https://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/rachael-ray/spicy-hummus-quick-chickpea-spread-recipe-1912417>) requires a can of chickpeas, tahini (similar to peanut butter but made with sesame seeds), garlic, ½ fresh lemon, some spices and a food processor. The hummus will be sure to satisfy you and guests, if you decide to share.

Eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds and legumes can provide all the nutrients to maintain good health without the need to use vitamins or supplements. The health benefits of eating in a vegetarian style are great. The consumption of phytochemicals or the chemicals that provide fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and spices with color, odor and flavor, provide protection against the development and progression of cancer. (Melina, Craig, & Levin, 2016)

On a note to limit your intake of meat, especially red meat, The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) states “the latest research shows that eating more than 18 ounces of red meat (beef, lamb and pork) per week increases the risk of colorectal cancers.” (n. d.) The AICR recommends consuming no more than 3 portions or 12-18 ounces of red meat per week.

Also, the AICR states that “research shows that any amount of processed meat (sliced turkey and bologna deli

meats, bacon, ham, and hot dogs) eaten regularly increases the risk of both stomach and colorectal cancers. Processed meats are meats that have been preserved by smoking, salting, curing or adding other preservatives.” (n. d.)

The Vegetarian Plate is identical to MyPlate yet the protein sources include legumes, nuts, nut butters, seeds, seed butters, seitan (wheat gluten), tempeh (fermented soybeans) and tofu. Take the challenge to have a meatless Monday...and maybe Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, too.

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- Additional credible resources may be found at <https://www.vrg.org/nutrition/>

MEATLESS MONDAY

Simple Wellness: Stress Management

By Leonard Martineau, PhD, LMBT, RYT
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As the New Year dawns, we can surely expect a flood of gadgets, products, books and pills that will claim to 'reduce stress.' First, the idea will be floated that stress is somehow 'bad' or 'unhealthy.' Second, the seed will be planted that there is (somehow) something 'wrong' with a person who experiences stress. Third, the over-complication of stress-reduction methods might co-mingle with our own feelings of stress-management inadequacy to consequently create more stress.



This short article will offer a few simple tips that may serve to inspire us to tap into the multiple, simple ways to facilitate higher levels of wellness (1) in the now moment, and (2) for life.

It is important to note that stress (even distress) is not inherently bad. Many of our greatest successes have been born out of feelings of stress. Maybe we can embrace stress, and view it as the pressure that "turns coal into a diamond." Once we've released ourselves from the stress-stigma, we can become more aware of what causes distress in our lives, and take simple steps to reduce unnecessary, non-beneficial forms of distress.

Tip 1: Leave early

Have you ever noticed how well everyone else on the road drives – when you aren't in a rush? I recently experienced several hun-

dred miles of driving (from Charlotte to Key West) which, on past trips has felt incredibly stressful. The difference (this time) was that I had nowhere that I had to go, and no time that I had to be there. The drive became a pleasure, filled with unexpected turns, photos of nature, and ease.

Leaving early allows us to slow down and enjoy the ride.

Tip 2: Sit in silence

We have a 'Zen Room' in the David Belk Center, where faculty and staff can take a momentary, silent retreat. The room has a video screen, computer, projector, speaker system, diffuser, foot massager, blankets and even a mini-waterfall. While the props are fantastic, the true benefit of the Zen Room is that the user must consciously decide to take a moment for him/herself, because s/he understands the value of 'just sitting.'

A simple way to create silence while immediately reducing distress is to turn off the news. It is actually possible to move away from the notion that we need to be newsy in the first place! We can give birth to wellness moments for ourselves at any time (even right now?) by simply deciding to sit – and breathe.

Tip 3: Give a heartfelt compliment

I'd argue that one of the single, most powerful stress management strategies isn't a strategy at all. Let's call it 'friends.' Friendships create an underlying, calm foundation that, like the depths of the ocean, is unaffected by surface turbulence. One way to cultivate friendships is to give a heartfelt compliment to someone. Try it today!

A sincere, specific compliment will immediately provide the giver and receiver with the type of wellness break that can never be measured, quantitatively.



Tip 4: Use pain as a springboard to gratitude

Pain, grief, sadness, and fear: All of it (when felt) can be used as a vector to tap us back into the multitude of experiences that we can feel grateful for. In fact, if we hadn't experienced the great stuff, we wouldn't even be able to recognize pain! Robin Williams' character (in the movie 'Good Will Hunting') says to Will: "You're going to have bad times, Will... but they'll just wake you up to the good times that you weren't paying attention to." Pain (yes, pain) can be a blessing in disguise.

Tip 5: Prepare

We've all experienced the distress associated with not being prepared for a class, or a presentation, or a test, etc. Just like the pleasure-drive to work (in tip #1), being prepared diffuses distress while bolstering self-efficacy and increasing self-esteem. In fact, preparation can be used to enhance each of the preceding four tips.

Prepare, and watch your world unfold like a bright, young flower on a beautiful spring day.

Summary

'Stress' is not always the demon that it is made out to be. Each of us can take simple steps to manage stressful situations, and we can do so in the here-and-now moment. If any of these five tips reminded you of some of the simple things that you do to facilitate self-wellness, please send me your tips (martineau.leonard@gaston.edu). Maybe we can highlight your ideas in a future article.

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