

Taking Control of Yourself.

Being your own master is much more fun than being a slave to yourself.

Relevant to: Depression: Anxiety: Irritability/Anger: General emotional control:

It is curious just how many people have trouble 'controlling themselves'. In a way it's not surprising, because of the different parts of the brain competing with each other, but nevertheless, it's a curious phenomenon. And the rewards are great for those who can decide the way they want to be and then to be that way.

What do you want to do?

In self-control we tend to talk negatively: to drink less; to give up smoking; to eat less; to be less grouchy; to be less anxious, etc. And there's no harm in that, it's a good starting point. What is it you want to do?

Why do you want to do it?

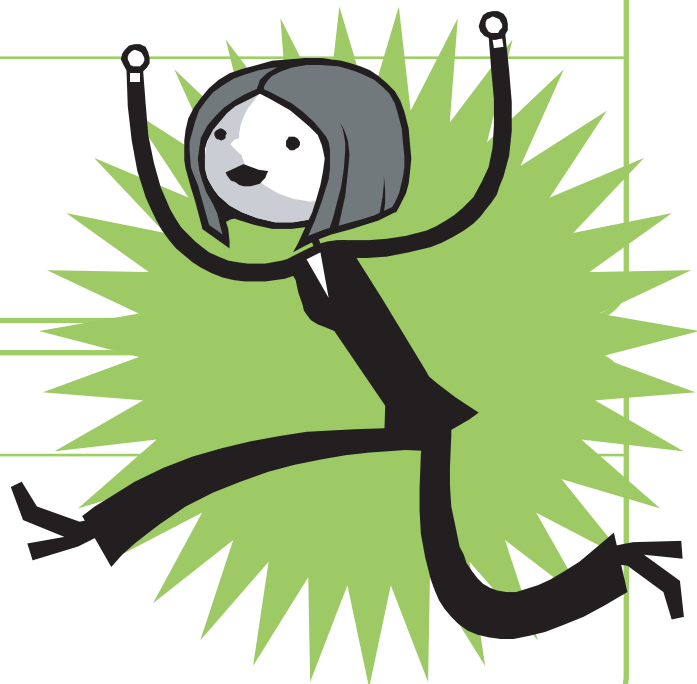
There's nothing quite so motivating as knowing what the payoff is going to be: I'll feel fitter and more energetic; I'll have more money to spend on things I like; I'll keep more of my friends, and so on. These are big pay-offs and it's good to know what you stand to gain.

Be precise

Say exactly what you want to do. E.g. "I'm going to drink just one glass of wine on Sunday to Thursday, and no more than three glasses on Friday and Saturday." Or "I'm never again going to fall out with anyone." If you're not quite sure where the target is, it's very difficult to hit it.

Be positive

The brain tends to think better with positive images. So it finds it easier to think "I'm going to be friendly to people" than "I'm not going to argue with people". It finds it easier to think "I'm going to eat and drink really healthily" rather than "I'm going to stop eating and drinking too much."



Have a plan

Get a piece of paper and write some ideas down. Controlling ourselves is perfectly easy but you have to take it seriously. If you don't work out a plan then you're making it really difficult for yourself. "Willpower" is fine, but you need more than that; you need a plan.

Go public

Tell others what you are doing, and see if they will help you. Not everybody will: friends who are overweight will have mixed feelings about your determination to eat and drink healthily. Your smoking buddies won't be entirely pleased you're giving up.

Ask for help

Controlling yourself is your responsibility, no-one else's, and it's good to bear that in mind. On the other hand there are good people about who may well like to help you, and the support of those around you makes it much more likely you'll succeed. If you have a faith then you might like to ask for spiritual help, but remember the old adage: 'God helps those who help themselves'.

Keep a record

There's nothing quite so encouraging as seeing written evidence of your progress. An exercise book is cheap, a computer document is free (so long as you have a computer). Write down the data, make graphs if you want, but at least keep a real record of how you are doing.

Never give up

How many people do you know who have given up smoking and never gone back to it? Not many; most succeed after several failed attempts. What marks them out is not that they failed but that they kept coming back until they succeeded once and for all. And that is typical; usually you have to learn from your failures, improve the plan, improve the support maybe, and try again until you succeed.

In-session Discussion/Project.

How have you tried to control yourself and succeeded? How did you do it?
What do you want to achieve now?

After Session Project.

If there is something you want to get control of in yourself, then sit down and make a plan to do it. Go through all the headings on this sheet and see how they apply to what you want to achieve.

Tip: After session projects are important, so the group leader will enquire how you got on, next time. So you might want to make a note of things you'll report back to the group, but don't tell things about yourself you don't want to.

Mythbuster:

"If you're low on willpower then there is nothing you can do about it." Not true.

The evidence is clear that people who use techniques like those described here can do things they otherwise couldn't do.