

It's important to mindfully examine what is really driving habitual behavior in order to make lasting change. This process can help eliminate the 'resolution trap' that so often leaves us feeling defeated. Try these steps to evaluate your less than helpful habits. Once you really understand your habits, and the reward or 'treat' you are truly seeking, you are in a better position to make lasting change.

Example number one:

Notice the **trigger** - It's a Friday night. You have no plans, and you are tired from your workweek. You come home and automatically turn on the television in an attempt to relax.

Identify the **trance** - The sound of the television puts you in the "I-need -to-go-to-the-fridge-and-get -some-ice-cream" trance. Before you know it, your pint of mint chocolate chip is half gone!

Label the **treat** – (*hint: it's not the ice cream.*) Look deeper. Take a few breaths and ask yourself what you really need. Are you trying to boost your blood sugar? Are you feeling lonely, do you want to calm your nervous system?

Trade it in - experiment with less harmful substitutes. Try a handful of almonds to see if this helps you eat less ice cream. Call a friend to see if it's social connection you really crave. Start to associate the TV with a warm bath by turning on the tube and filling the tub with a hot water at the same time. Trade in some TV time for the relaxing bath.

Example number two:

Notice the **trigger** – It's a busy school night. You have just helped the kiddies with homework, monitored piano practice, and made certain everyone is clean and fed.

Identify the **trance** - As you finish putting the leftovers away you notice the bottle of chardonnay in the fridge. "Just one glass," you say to yourself.

Label the **treat** – (*hint: it's not the wine.*) Look deeper. Take a few breaths and ask yourself what you really need. Are you trying to boost your blood sugar? Are you angry because your to-do list is too long? Do you need to shut out the world for a little while?

Trade it in - experiment with less harmful substitutes. Train yourself to put the teapot on and have herbal tea at least three nights a week to start. Talk to your spouse or partner or hire a high school student to help you knock a few items off your evening to-do list. Start to play calming music while you clean the kitchen. Make that a cue to practice five minutes of gentle yoga after the last dish is put away.

Notice how this process is more self-compassionate than forcing sudden change?

If the treat you reach for ultimately makes you unhappy, continue to gently and mindfully explore what you are really going after.

We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!

