Truth be told, we are all creatures of habits. We buy the same foods, prepare the same recipes, sit in front of the television snacking at night – you know those habits that are ingrained in our daily routines.

The problem is that we get so comfy in our routines, even when they undermine health, that it is hard to give up old habits. In order to help improve your health, you need to shake up your routine and start thinking differently about your diet, exercise and lifestyle routines.

**Breaking Bad Habits**

Practicing the same habits over and over again makes them stronger than new habits you may want to develop. And in times of stress, the draw to those bad habits becomes even stronger, even with the best of intentions.

To begin to break those bad habits you need to become aware of the habits you want to change, figure out why these bad habits exist and make a plan to slowly change one habit at a time into a new, healthier one. Researchers have found that the slow, gradual approach of tackling one habit at a time breeds the most long-term success.

Consider these six simple tips to help change bad habits into healthy habits that may trim your waistline and improve your health:

**Six Tips to Adopting Healthier Habits**

1. **Take it one step at a time.** Change is hard, especially when you totally disrupt your usual routine. Set yourself up for success by only attempting to change one bad habit at a time. Examples of good habits that can translate into lifelong healthy behaviors:

   a. Start each day with a nutritious breakfast.

   b. Exercise at least 30 minutes a day.

   c. Get 8 hours of sleep each night, as fatigue can lead to overeating.

   d. Eat your meals seated at a table.

   e. Eat more meals with your partner or family.

   f. Learn to eat when you’re hungry and stop when you’re comfortably full.

   g. Reduce your portion sizes by 20%, or give up second helpings.

   h. Eat five servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

   i. Eat meals or snack every few hours, never go more than 4 hours between meals other than at night.

   j. Experiment with new lighter recipes and healthy cooking methods, such as grilling, roasting, baking or poaching.

   k. Drink more water and fewer sweetened beverages.

   l. Buy less processed foods, sweets and treats.
2. **Become a mindful eater.** One of the first steps toward overcoming unhealthy eating habits is to pay more attention to what you are eating and drinking. Sit down at a table without the distractions of phones, television or books and enjoy the dining experience. Soothing music, conversation and a meal attractively presented can enhance the satisfaction of the meal. Some people benefit by keeping food diaries.

3. **Make a detailed plan for each habit.** If your goal is to get physical activity for 30 minutes each day – how are you going to fit that into your schedule? Just saying you are going to do it does not lead to positive outcomes. Spell out precisely when and how you will adopt the new habit so it becomes part of your daily routine.

4. **Tackle a new habit to change each week.** Baby steps may eventually add up to healthy changes that can go the distance. The goal is to repeat the healthy behaviors regularly so they overtake the bad habits and become the new normal. If a bad habit takes longer than a week, no problem. It may take up to a month for any new action to become habit.

5. **Be realistic with your goals.** Change is hard and some of those habits are going to take time to break especially if you have been doing them for years. Slow and steady may help win the race. If your goal is to lose weight, experts recommend about 1-2 pounds weight loss per week. Most people drop several pounds initially then level off to a few pounds weekly.

6. **Practice stress relief.** Find coping mechanisms to deal with the stress in your life so it doesn't bring back those bad habits. Deal with stress through exercise, relaxation, yoga or meditation.