

Epicurean strategies for dealing with bad habits and urges.

Post by “Daniel188” of November 24, 2025 at 3:15 AM

Hi, I'd like to ask you about the methods the Epicureans taught for improving our habits and avoiding unnecessary emotions.

Surely, each of us is sometimes influenced by an impulse that, if acted upon, leads to bad consequences (for example, eating junk food, smoking cigarettes), or we experience emotions that cause us to do something we shouldn't.

In such cases, the Stoics recommended working on judgments because they believed that all emotions are the result of individual judgments. But what did the Epicureans think about this, and what can we think about it when we combine it with modern scientific research?

Post by “Cassius” of November 24, 2025 at 3:25 AM

[Quote from Daniel188](#)

and avoiding unnecessary emotions.

My first response would be that Epicurus would never look at life from this perspective. Life is all about feeling and Diogenes Laertius says that Epicurus held that the wise man will feel his emotions more deeply than will others, and this will not be a hindrance to his wisdom.

I would start by listening to the emotions and making sure you know what they are telling you, and being glad that you have them.

Post by “Daniel188” of November 24, 2025 at 3:38 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

My first response would be that Epicurus would never look at life from this perspective. Life is all about feeling and Diogenes Laertius says that Epicurus held that the wise man will feel his emotions more deeply than will others, and this will not be a hindrance to his wisdom.

I would start by listening to the emotions and making sure you know what they are telling you, and being glad that you have them.

I understand what you're saying, and looking at various studies on people, they show that a lack of emotion usually results in an individual being unable to make decisions. But sometimes, certain strong emotions can also be harmful.

For example, fear can lead to discouragement from engaging in a specific activity. Anger can lead to unnecessary harm and hostility.

From an Epicurean perspective, I would say that in some cases, certain emotions cause no more pleasure than pain.

Post by "Cassius" of November 24, 2025 at 4:02 AM

Right and I see that your thread title is "bad habits and urges." But it seems clear that Stoicism and other aspects of Greek thought deemed all emotion as bad, and I wanted to get that point out front in the discussion. Once it's clear that emotion itself is not a bad thing, I would think the next question would be why the emotion has arisen and whether it is justified. I think it's well documented that Epicurus held that there are times when anger are both well justified, and I don't see how you can proceed without first evaluating the facts that led to them. As for "fear" in general, there's nothing terrible in life for those who understand that there is nothing terrible in not living, but that doesn't mean that particular situations aren't going to generate natural reactions of fear that should be heeded (e.g. standing at the end of a canyon looking down).

So I'm still thinking that the first thing to do is examine whether the feeling is justified. If it is justified, the first step is to take appropriate action. If it's not justified, then there's a problem in how the person is processing reality, and often there you've got the false framework that is at the root of stoicism and much religion, that of thinking that there is some other or higher reality that is more important than this one.

Post by “Daniel188” of November 24, 2025 at 4:14 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Right and I see that your thread title is "bad habits and urges." But it seems clear that Stoicism and other aspects of Greek thought deemed all emotion as bad, and I wanted to get that point out front in the discussion. Once it's clear that emotion itself is not a bad thing, I would think the next question would be why the emotion has arisen and whether it is justified. I think it's well documented that Epicurus held that there are times when anger are both well justified, and I don't see how you can proceed without first evaluating the facts that led to them. As for "fear" in general, there's nothing terrible in life for those who understand that there is nothing terrible in not living, but that doesn't mean that particular situations aren't going to generate natural reactions of fear that should be heeded (e.g. standing at the end of a canyon looking down).

So I'm still thinking that the first thing to do is examine whether the feeling is justified. If it is justified, the first step is to take appropriate action. If it's not justified, then there's a problem in how the person is processing reality, and often there you've got the false framework that is at the root of stoicism and much religion, that of thinking that there is some other or higher reality that is more important than this one.

Well, the title is probably inappropriate because I used the word "bad" as if such things were somehow supernaturally evil. But I was referring more to useless habits or emotions that harm a person. How can we practically get rid of them? For example, we know that reaching for unhealthy foods is harmful in the long run. How can we plan to change such habits? What are some effective strategies? That intrigued me.

As for the rest, I agree. You can't reject an emotion without considering whether it's useful or not. But I wouldn't necessarily agree that all other philosophical schools completely rejected emotions. The Stoics, for example, completely rejected anger and fear, but often used strictly technical definitions of these emotions. For example, they criticized fear, but considered caution to be *eupatheiai*. Therefore, emotions "in accordance with reason" were also recognized. Another example is Aristotle, who refers to the doctrine of the mean. He essentially viewed all emotions as beneficial when integrated with reason.

Post by “Martin” of November 24, 2025 at 5:35 AM

Here are examples of what has worked for me:

Chocolate mousse:

In the past, I splurged on chocolate mousse at a buffet restaurant where I ate about once per week. Eating a lot of chocolate mousse was certainly a bad habit because of the high sugar content.

When the restaurant changed from a big bowl, from which I would take several portions per meal, to prefilled small cups, this helped in providing a simple way to measure and limit the consumption.

I found that 3 cups provided already the maximum pleasure of the moment and more would go into saturation. Later on, I took only two cups and partially compensated the loss of pleasure by eating other tasty food with no sugar added.

After a while of keeping to the temporary habit of eating only two cups, the urge for a third cup/lack of the related pleasure disappeared. So, I limited the intake to one cup per meal, whereby I chose the cup which appeared to be filled the most.

After a while, the craving for a second cup disappeared. Then, I chose the cup which appeared to be filled the least.

After a while, the craving for that small amount disappeared. I did not take any more chocolate mousse and no other sweetened dessert. I watched my colleagues eating multiple cups of chocolate mousse and other sweetened desserts, without that I would crave again for the chocolate mousse.

Alcohol:

As a young adult, I rarely drank alcohol but when I did, I sometimes did binge-drinking. Each hangover made me dislike the particular type of alcoholic drink for an increasingly longer period, and eventually the dislike became permanent. In this way, I lost the taste for lager beer, which was bad because it has been the most common social drink in my circles. I felt that losing the taste for an increasing number of alcoholic drinks was bad.

At middle age, I started to drink spirits moderately in the evening during the cool season and almost none during the hot seasons in Thailand. I used a measuring cup to measure the alcohol intake per occasion, observed up to what dose the aftereffects were acceptable and limited the intake to that dose.

Eventually, I got hypertonia, about 5 years ahead of my age group. I measured that at the established limit of alcohol intake, there was a slight but significant increase in blood pressure in the morning.

So, I reduced the limit to half of what I had established before. At that level, it still gave me a little bit of a kick, so there was no big loss in pleasure.

Eventually, I went to a doctor, who prescribed blood pressure medicine, encouraged me to record my blood pressure daily, and answered "No" to my question whether I should discontinue drinking alcohol.

After preliminary retirement, my sleep deprivation disappeared because I could take naps at daytime. In turn, I could no longer fall asleep easily in the evening. I noticed that drinking spirits about half an hour before going to bed helped most of the time with falling asleep. As I monitor my blood pressure and treat it with medicine, I increased the alcohol intake to the limit which I

had established in middle age. The further plan is to try to decrease the limit again as long as I can still easily fall asleep at bedtime.

In conclusion, measuring a "bad" habit accurately, observing the effects of dose variation and gradually establishing a healthier habit for better long-term pleasure (health) has worked well while keeping short-term pleasure high.

Post by “Adrastus” of November 24, 2025 at 6:40 PM

Emotions are also just one piece of our Canon. Society is often quick to fill our anticipations with things we could be afraid of and our emotions might well follow suit if we believe such sources of information to be trustworthy; yet using our sense of sight of instance can help us determine whether any of these fears are actually indicating threats to our happiness and safety anywhere at all around us. A whole wild storm can rage in our minds and cause our bodies to painfully react; whilst outside in the world might be a pleasant, breezy, sunny day or a gentle shower that you could be enjoying if only your mind wasn't clouded by what are most likely false anticipations you really shouldn't be adding into any sort of calculation about how to live.

When we have these painful anticipations and disposition whether from thoughts or painful social and material conditions, it is not so much our bodies cravings for indulgences like booze, drugs or sweets or excesses of other food and drink that we need to be worrying about; but our trying to satiate or calm other cravings for safety, for happiness brought by friendly relations, for less worry and less stress by experiencing perhaps less abuse by others or the rigors our social systems put us through in these unhealthful ways that don't actually satiate those cravings. In this way, arranging our circumstances and environments and meeting the true, honestly discerned needs we have that our emotions and body sensations are actually asking for is the way forward. Sometimes waking up to the needs our sensations are telling us is painful or perhaps saddening (which may actually be healthful) work in itself as we realize perhaps that we have a lot of painful relations in our life that caused us to be dour, self (i.e. body)- denying in the first place. The lineage of these painful approaches to life can go back to our earliest memories and closest relationships and that can be extremely difficult to honestly recognize and address when all along we've been taught we mustn't reason from our anger, sadness, distress and such...

In these ways, it is more often false ideas that hurt us rather than our goodly emotions and bodily desires that become twisted by our false ideas and painful approaches to living.

Post by “Patrikios” of November 30, 2025 at 9:39 AM

[Quote from Daniel188](#)

Hi, I'd like to ask you about the methods the Epicureans taught for improving our habits and avoiding unnecessary emotions.

Surely, each of us is sometimes influenced by an impulse that, if acted upon, leads to bad consequences (for example, eating junk food, smoking cigarettes), or we experience emotions that cause us to do something we shouldn't.

[Daniel188](#)

Here's are some examples of writings I have found helpful in dealing with hurtful choices.

Philodemus' *On Anger* provides the most detailed practical methodology. He acknowledged that anger arises from our nature and should be treated with compassion rather than suppression

Philodemus' ***On Frank Speech*** describe the used of "frank criticism" (parrhesia) within the community of friends. This involves honest, caring confrontation where friends help each other identify harmful patterns. Philodemus emphasized this must be done with gentleness and proper timing.