

- Habit / Lifestyles

LASTING CHANGE

**AUSSIE
BATTLE**

The top five unhealthy habits in Australia are coffee for breakfast, alcohol, sugary foods, fast food and binge-watching TV.

SOURCE: ISELECT

Change for GOOD



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Great at changing your habits for a while... but then slip back into those bad behaviours? Find out why and how you can bring about lasting change.

BY BRIGID MOSS

How many times have you embarked on a 'health kick' with gusto – diligently logging 10,000 steps daily, eating 30 different veg weekly, waking up each day with no hangover... only to slowly break the healthy promises you made until, without realising it, you're back to chocolate, wine and doomscrolling?

So, why don't we stay on track? According to GP Dr Rangan Chatterjee's book *Make Change That Lasts*, it's because "we're not getting to the root cause of our behaviours". If anyone knows about this, it's Dr Chatterjee, a world-renowned health podcast host who's interviewed some of the best self-development minds in the world.

"If you're using alcohol to manage the stress in your life, you can do without it for the four weeks of January. But at the end of January, if you haven't dealt with the stress, you'll end up where you were before," says Dr Chatterjee. You'll probably feel even worse, he adds. ►

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“Because you won’t think that the eating or exercise or no-drinking plan was the problem, you’ll think *you’re* the problem. You’ll think you’ve failed, which leads to guilt, shame and regret.”

Getting to the source

To have the healthy life you imagine, you need to take a deeper look at yourself – or, as Dr Chatterjee puts it, “you need to look upstream”. In the book, he describes nine underlying patterns of behaviour that, left unchallenged, stress us out and give us inner discomfort that boomerangs us back to our bad habits. “Most people who are overconsuming sugar, for example, know they are already,” he says. “They have all the external knowledge. I want to give them the internal knowledge.”

Dr Chatterjee calls these patterns ‘reliances’. “If there’s any behaviour you have a problematic relationship with, you probably have a reliance you’re not aware of, but that’s keeping you tied to it.” If that’s not sugar or alcohol, it might be online shopping instead of going to the gym, or scrolling instead of meditating.

Digging down into you

Dr Chatterjee admits that he used to be at the mercy of his reliances, too. “Five years ago, I had a year where I said, ‘This is the year I will nail meditation.’” He started meditating religiously for 20 minutes every day. “Then I missed a day and thought, ‘You couldn’t do it, could you?’ Then I stopped meditating. But now, if I miss a day’s meditation, I don’t feel guilt. I’m not all or nothing. I think, ‘That’s interesting.’”

Knowing himself has made the difference. “I’m a better human being when I do my morning practice, so tomorrow I’ll make sure I do it. Dare I say it, I quite like myself these days, as I feel I’m behaving with integrity and compassion. And with that energy behind you, behaviour change becomes easier. When we aren’t behaving like the person we wish to be, it creates a fracture within us and that void will be filled with sugar, alcohol, shopping or doomscrolling.”

HOW TO MAKE THE CHANGE

Dr Chatterjee says a lot of the power to change will come from realising your own reliances in action, upstream of the unwanted behaviour. “Eighty per cent of the change comes from that first awareness, where you suddenly go, ‘I get it. That’s what’s happening for me!’” he says. “As soon as you become aware of any one of these reliances, you’ll experience a difference within days.”

In the book, after explaining each reliance, he includes practices you can do to get closer to the person you want to be. Some involve journalling, meditating or using different words.

“As you understand yourself better, your self-esteem will go up, your confidence will grow and you’ll feel less stressed,” he says. “You’ll be less reactive and kinder to the people around you. You’ll feel more in control of your life – and research shows that people who feel this are healthier.”

And don’t worry, you can still eat the sugar – if you do it intentionally. “We’ve all got a sweet tooth, right? But I can now do something I couldn’t do five years ago, and that’s eat the brownie and enjoy it. Rather than the old version of me, who ate it because I’d had a fight or because someone criticised me online, I’m choosing to enjoy it.”

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NOT FOR SALE

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WHAT ARE YOUR INVISIBLE RELIANCES?

All of us will have some of the following nine reliances or patterns. Recognising yours is the first step. The next step is to do the suggested exercise (there are more in Dr Chatterjee's book).

1 Reliance on EXPERTS

THE PATTERN: If you've stopped listening to yourself about what works for you, Dr Chatterjee says, then "I don't think the most helpful question is, 'Which expert should I trust?' It's, 'Why do I no longer trust myself?' We need to give ourselves the chance to listen to our body's signals."

WHAT TO DO: Spend the first 10 minutes of your day in solitude, to get to know yourself. "This is where you sit with your own thoughts," he says. "That could be journaling, meditation, breathwork or just sitting with a cup of coffee in the morning." ▶



2 Reliance on **PERFECTION**

THE PATTERN: You're a perfectionist and so never feel good enough. "We're surrounded by media-created heroes, who make for distorted models for us to copy," explains Dr Chatterjee. Instead of emulating the person you admire, be inspired by them.

WHAT TO DO: Do this hero journaling exercise to prove that you're heroic in your own way. "Most of us show up as a hero every day of our lives," says Dr Chatterjee. Before you go to bed, write down three small moments of heroism. These could be anything from giving a compliment to doing something hard, or something for someone you love.

3 Reliance on **BEING LIKED**

THE PATTERN: Your need to be liked has made you a people pleaser. While you may get more friends this way, you'll also get more stress and anxiety – and no time for yourself.

WHAT TO DO: Learn to build healthy boundaries. Answer these questions: Do you ever struggle to say no? Why? What are you afraid of? What's the worst thing that'll happen if you say no? What's the best thing that'll happen? What's the most likely thing that'll happen?

4 Reliance on **COMFORT**

THE PATTERN: We probably all do it, because we've become over-reliant on never experiencing discomfort. This stops us pushing ourselves and trying new challenges. It gives us an unrealistic expectation that we can always get what we want, when we want it, which makes us feel stressed when we don't.

WHAT TO DO: Tell your brain that you can cope with ordinary discomfort. Practise this new mindset by doing fasting, wild swimming, cold showers, park runs, endurance races, basic camping, a morning routine or trying something new.

5 Reliance on **BEING RIGHT**

THE PATTERN: You're someone who always needs to win or are quick to take offence, for example on social media or via email. When you decide someone else is rude or wrong, this tells your nervous system that you're in danger, which ramps up your stress and anxiety.

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WHAT TO DO: Use these five words to navigate tricky conversations: "I have a different perspective." It sounds simple, but it's astonishingly powerful," says Dr Chatterjee. "It allows you to continue your dialogue without making the other person 'wrong'. It's a phrase that has curiosity and compassion at its heart and has been transformative in my marriage."

6 Reliance on THINGS NEVER GOING WRONG

THE PATTERN: You need everything to go exactly to plan, and this sets you up for stress and failure, and puts you into a victim mindset when things don't unfold as expected.

WHAT TO DO: Foster a mindset that's optimistic but also realistic by catching yourself complaining when things aren't going like clockwork. Then reframe it either as a moment of gratitude (remind yourself how much worse things could be and how lucky you are in other ways) or a call to action (embrace your ability to make the situation better).

7 Reliance on THE PAST

THE PATTERN: You find it hard to move on from things. "You don't want to be a prisoner to your past," Dr Chatterjee says. Therapy may help, but there are things you can do for yourself, too.

WHAT TO DO: Visualisation is mentally practising how you want to be, which helps stop you falling into old patterns. Journal these questions in the morning: How do I want to act today? How do I want to show up with my family? How do I want to interact with the people I work with? What are behaviours of mine that I no longer wish to repeat? Which qualities do I want to showcase to the world today?

8 Reliance on BUSYNESS

THE PATTERN: Are you always on the go conducting tasks? "Relying on busyness to feel successful is the fastest track I know to emotional and physical sickness," says Dr Chatterjee.

WHAT TO DO: Take a slow day once a week. Walk slowly in nature, take extra time to cook meals, have a slow, relaxed lunch or dinner, do something mindful such as knitting, crocheting or painting, or work on a complex jigsaw. And, for a more purposeful life, ask yourself this question each morning: What is the most important thing I have to do today? Then focus on it.

9 Reliance on PEOPLE

THE PATTERN: Human beings need connection, so we all require this reliance. We thrive when we can depend on other people, especially those close to us.

WHAT TO DO: Think about these four social circles: community, friends, family and partner. Ask yourself: are they being nourished? For the ones that aren't, write down one action each month that you can do to strengthen that social circle. **P**



*Make Change That Lasts:
9 Simple Ways to Break Free
From the Habits That Hold
You Back* by Dr Rangan
Chatterjee (Penguin Life,
\$39.99) is out now.

