

your personal **happiness** protection plan

Everyone's got bad habits such as lateness or procrastination. But if you consistently act in ways that cause you to lose face, lose friends or fail when a goal is within reach, your harmless personality quirks may have morphed into serious self-sabotage. "A bad habit becomes destructive when your behavior causes more than momentary regret and leaves you feeling disappointed in yourself," says Pauline Wallin, Ph.D., author of *Taming Your Inner Brat*.

Why do we derail our own happiness? Experts attribute it to a variety of unconscious beliefs: nagging doubt about whether we really deserve what we're striving for; apprehension that we won't be able to handle increased expectations and responsibilities; even fear that our achievement may isolate us from our peers or family members.

To overcome self-sabotage, you must first identify its origin and then take steps to interrupt the cycle. Here are five ways you might be tripping yourself up, and suggestions for how to (finally) get out of your own damn way.

procrastinator can recognize—take a moment to look inward for the source of your foot dragging. Ask yourself what's the absolute worst that could happen. Then spin the consequences out to their most ludicrous degree: Would your family and friends disown you? Would you end up starving and homeless? Would the cat die? Once you've realized things aren't so awful, you can get past the anxiety and focus on the work, says Ferrari.

FATAL FLAW 2

You shop yourself into bankruptcy.

You deserve to have nice things—but unfortunately treating yourself can lead to lively early-morning chats with bill collectors and a colorful credit report.

The ugly truth: "Impulse shopping is another way to mask negative feelings," explains Dana Lightman, Ph.D., a behavioral psychologist in Philadelphia. So, like emotional eaters who gorge on ice cream when they're down, chronic spenders try to numb feelings of boredom, depression or inadequacy by filling up on stuff. With every shiny new pur-

write down your feelings whenever you're tempted to mindlessly reach for plastic. Pretty soon you'll begin to recognize what sets you off before you click "Buy Now!"—and learn to find healthy distractions instead. "Go for a run, talk to a friend, see a movie, do anything that will get you out of a shopping mode," says Leslie.

Or simply focus on all the amazing qualities you possess, rather than on the things you own. "Consider all that you have to offer," suggests [redacted]. "Those natural talents have nothing to do with the kind of handbag you carry or what shoes you wear." Maybe you remember everyone's birthday, or you're a great cook or supportive friend. Do something that lets those gifts shine. "By taking pride in your best attributes, you'll feel less of a pull to spend on things that say, 'See! I am worthwhile!'"

FATAL FLAW 3

You binge when your goal weight is within sight.

You've earned some quality just-us-girls

EVERYONE'S GOT BAD HABITS, BUT IF YOURS LOSE FACE OR LOSE FRIENDS, IT'S TIME TO

FATAL FLAW 1

You procrastinate.

Tomorrow is soon enough. Besides, you excel under pressure.

The ugly truth: You're secretly afraid your work won't be perfect and you'll be outed as a fraud. "Procrastinators tend to be very concerned about what other people think of them," says Joseph Ferrari, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at DePaul University in Chicago. "If you worry that you will never perform as well as you have in the past, fear of failure may be halting your progress." Putting off work provides a ready-made excuse: Instead of admitting failure, you can always blame your busy schedule and overbooked calendar. "That way, you can tell yourself the project would have been successful if only you'd had more time," Ferrari explains.

The fix: Play the worst-case scenario game.

The next time your grasp on deadlines starts to slip—something even the worst

chase, splurgeaholics tell themselves: Well, okay, so I didn't solve that nagging problem today, but at least I cleaned out the shoe department at Nordstrom. Some people find it easier to decorate their lives in an effort to create the appearance, rather than the substance, of success. Mind you, there's nothing wrong with a little retail therapy, like the occasional lipstick or CD purchase. But if you're sinking into debt, regularly paying your bills late and not achieving your financial goals, then it's a problem you literally can't afford.

The fix: Know yourself as well as you know what you own.

Carol Leslie, an executive coach in Cleveland, suggests you use a trusty dieters' trick to keep track of the things you normally do without thinking—like polish off a quart of ice cream. Or, in this case, shop. Attach a small, thin notebook around your wallet with a rubber band so that it can serve as a reminder to

time with your old pals Little Debbie, Mrs. Fields and Sara Lee.

The ugly truth: You may not have been prepared for the male attention your new body brings, which can make you feel vulnerable. Or maybe your friends seem jealous of your success, and you're uncomfortable with their scrutiny. Getting down to a healthy weight also means maintaining it, which is a tough task unto itself. Plus, when things don't go your way—you get dumped or you don't get the job you went after—you can't use your "It's because I'm fat" excuse. "Life often feels simpler without these issues, and it's easier to eat a whole bag of potato chips and retreat to your fatter, safer world," explains Connie Tyne, executive director of the Cooper Wellness Program in Dallas.

The fix: See yourself the way others do.

It's hard to stop thinking of yourself as overweight even after the pounds are gone. But improving your self-image can