



# The Battleground

## ACTIVITY SHEET



The battle for control over our habitual patterns of behaviour is like a tug of war between our emotional brain (limbic system) and our logical/rational brain (prefrontal cortex). Without a battleplan, the emotional brain will win every time. With each triumph, the limbic system grows stronger – currently reigning as the undefeated heavyweight champion in most people’s brain. In order to beat our emotional opponent in the ring, we need to size up its strengths and weaknesses. In this session we will learn how to outwit, outsmart, and outplay the emotional brain at its own game.



### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

#### **This session is designed to help you:**

- (a)** learn how the brain works as it relates to habit formation and maintenance
- (b)** understand the role pleasure and pain play in behaviour governance
- (c)** develop strategies to win the battle for your mind (regaining control of your limbic system)

# The Limbic System

The emotional brain has no moral conscience. If it likes something, it wants more of it (irrespective of whether or not it's good for you). While it may be primitive in nature, it is very clever in getting what it desires and demands. It tricks you into believing you are justified in giving in to that which you crave. The problem is, in every good deception, there's always an element of truth.



From the list of excuses and justifications below, separate the lie from the truth.

EXAMPLE: It's really no big deal. Everyone does it.

It was a '50% OFF' sale. I just couldn't resist the bargain.

It helps me relax and have more fun. I need it to feel like a better person.

It's really no one else's business. I'm not hurting anyone else.

It would be wrong to say no. I'll just have one more to be polite.

I was feeling down. This is the only thing that really helps lift me up.

I know I'm in a hole right now, but I'm feeling lucky. I'm due for a win.

I'm just so tired. I really can't get up and do anything. I just need to rest.

It's just one slice. If I eat it now, I won't have to wrestle temptation all night.

Sometimes you've just got to be a little daring. There's no harm in 'just once'.

All of my friends are into it. If I stop, I won't have anyone to hang with.

I know it was risky, but it rocked my world. No risk no fun, right?

I can't resist it. It just looks so yum. Look... a broken bit... it must be a sign!

If no one finds out, no one will get hurt. It's better to just keep it a secret.

It's important to do things well. If it's not perfect, it's not done right.

It's socially acceptable these days; therefore, it mustn't really be that much of a big deal.

First, I need to do this. Until then, life-balance is impossible.

It's not like I'm doing anything, I'm just watching. There's no harm in just looking.

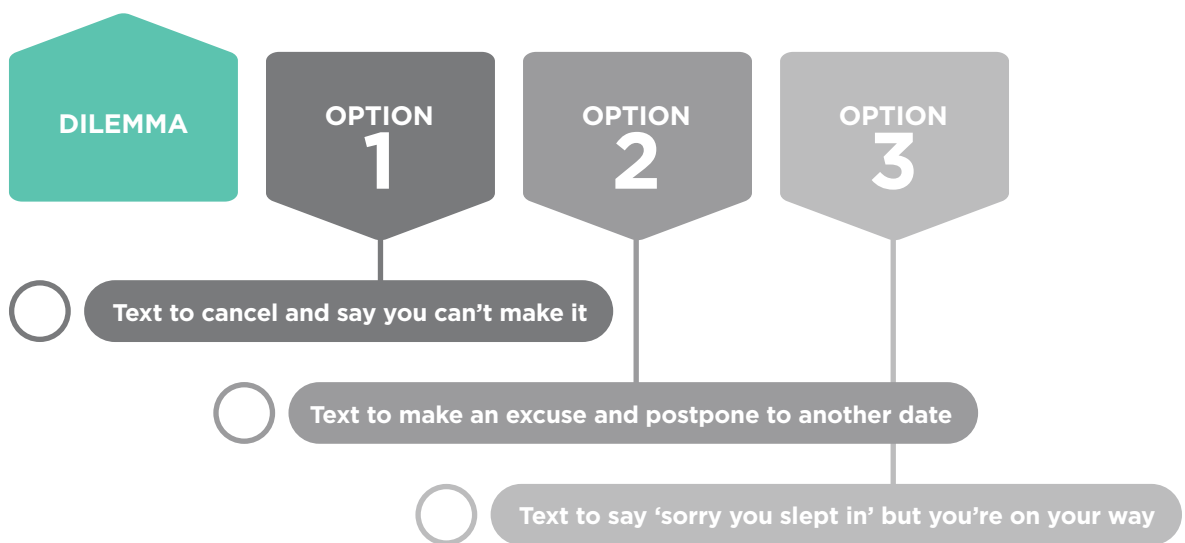
# The Prefrontal Cortex

Your prefrontal cortex is responsible for making executive decisions (for example, making judgements about what is right or wrong, good or bad, wicked or wonderful). This logical-rational thinking brain considers the impact your choices will have not only on your immediately life, but also on your future and on those around you. When confronted with urges, cravings or temptations, our prefrontal cortex helps us make wise choices that benefits everyone.

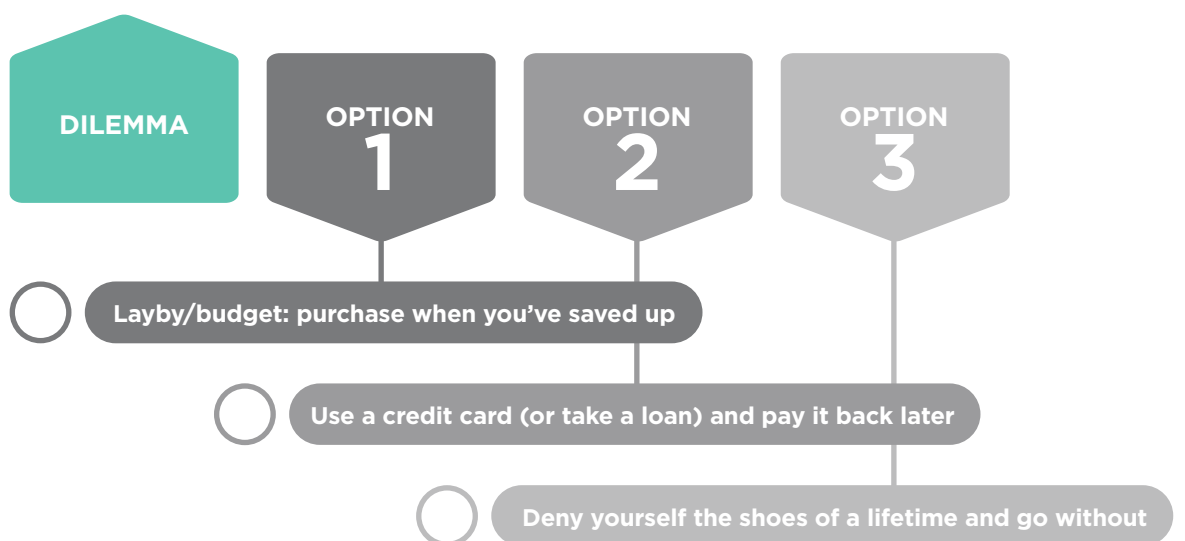


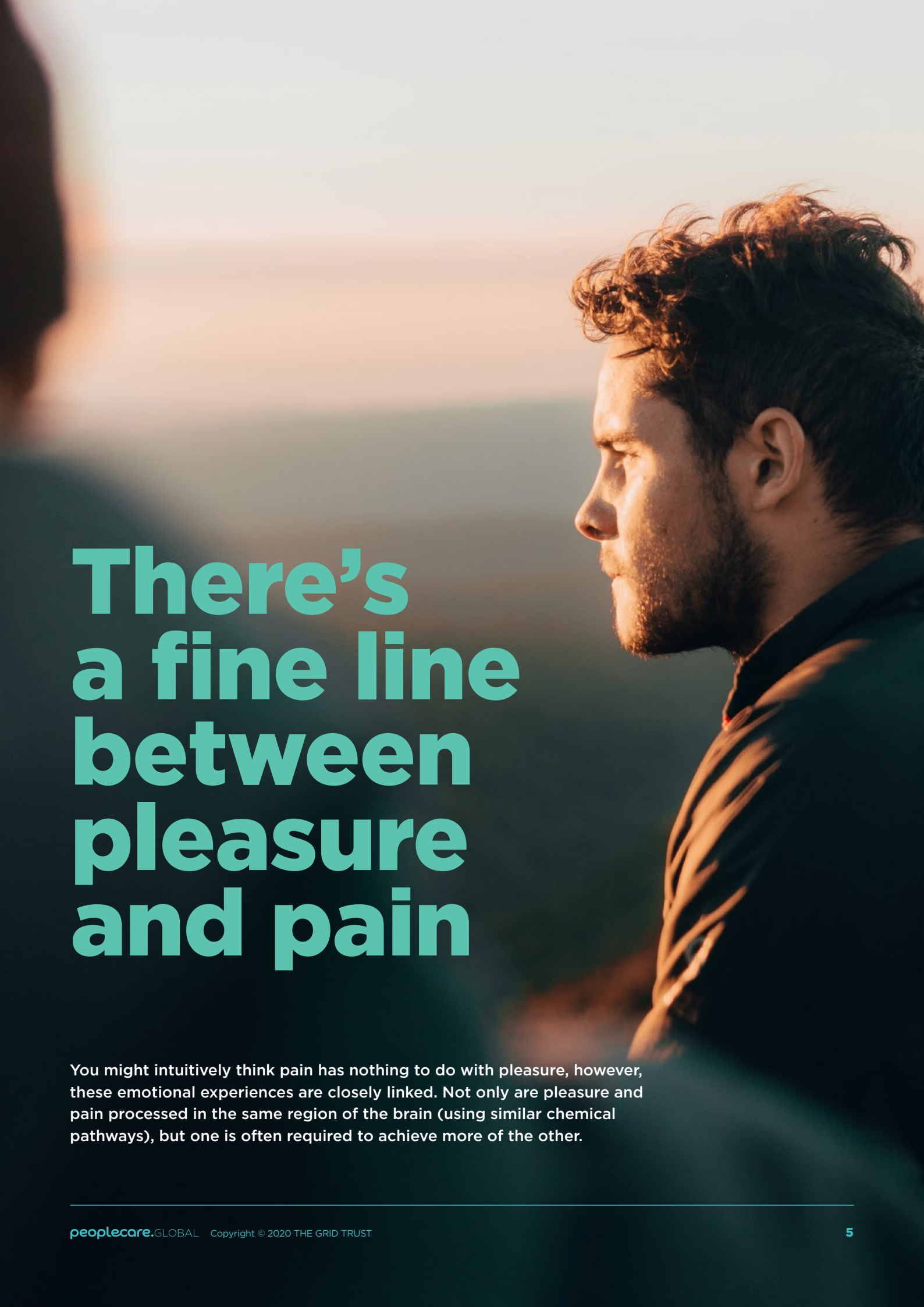
Consider the following dilemmas and determine which is the wisest decision to make:

**A** You were supposed to go running with a friend, but you've slept in



**B** You've found the best shoes, but you haven't budgeted for them



A man with dark, curly hair and a beard is shown in profile, looking out towards a sunset. The background is a soft, warm glow of orange and yellow light, suggesting a beach or coastal setting. The man is wearing a dark jacket. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

# There's a fine line between pleasure and pain

You might intuitively think pain has nothing to do with pleasure, however, these emotional experiences are closely linked. Not only are pleasure and pain processed in the same region of the brain (using similar chemical pathways), but one is often required to achieve more of the other.



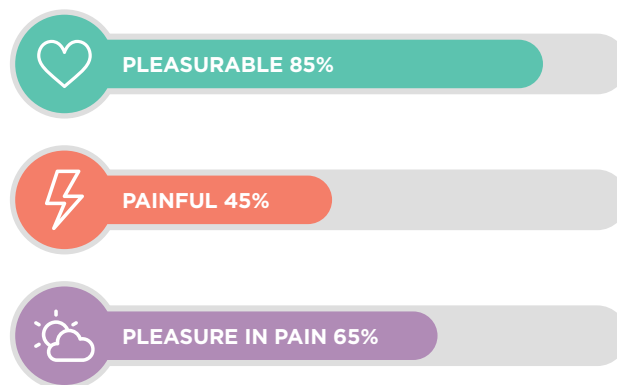
# Pleasure and Pain

Pleasure and pain is experienced on an emotional continuum, with extreme pain and pleasure being polar opposites. However, there are times when pleasure and pain collide. What starts out as being painful, may over time become pleasurable. However, over time, the pleasurable experiences you chase after may end up causing you pain. There's such a fine line between pleasure and pain that sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between them.

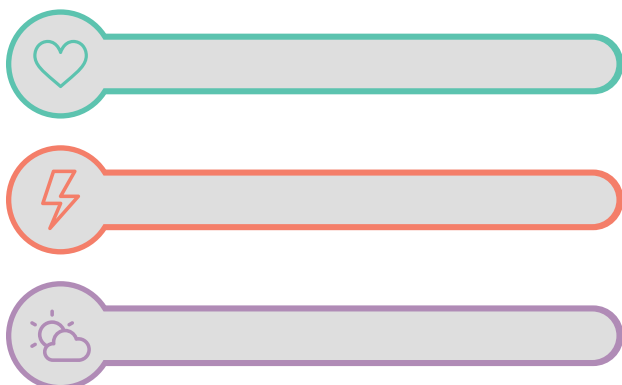


Which of the following experiences do you consider more painful and/or pleasurable?

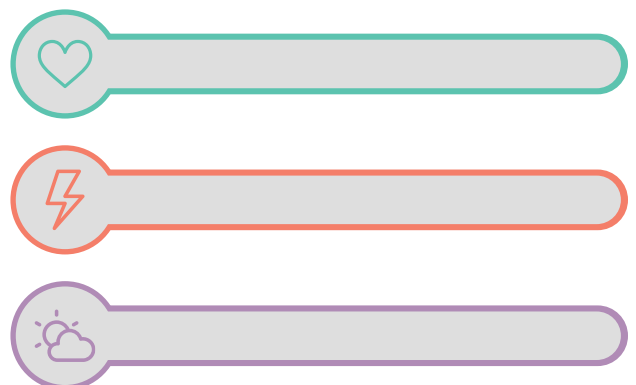
**EXAMPLE:**  
Eating hot 'n' spicy buffalo wings



## 01 GOING FOR A RUN



## 02 HAVING A REMEDIAL MASSAGE



### 03 VISITING IN-LAWS

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### 04 DRINKING ALCOHOL

Progress bar with heart icon

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### 05 LISTENING TO COUNTRY MUSIC

Progress bar with heart icon

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### 06 HAVING A THIRD SLICE OF CAKE

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# Trigger Happy

The pursuit of pleasure can be triggered by external or internal experiences. External triggers are situational, circumstantial or environmental factors that prompt a desire, craving or behavioural urge. Internal triggers, however, come from within. They include a variety of thoughts and feelings that likewise leave you craving reward or relief. By identifying what exactly triggers you (externally or internally), you can circumvent cravings or better manage them when they occur.



Which of the following external/internal triggers precede your unwanted/unhelpful habits?

EXTERNAL TRIGGERS		INTERNAL TRIGGERS	
<input type="radio"/>	HOME ALONE	<input type="radio"/>	HEADACHE
<input type="radio"/>	PUB ATMOSPHERE	<input type="radio"/>	HUNGRY
<input type="radio"/>	ARGUMENT/CONFLICT	<input type="radio"/>	AFRAID
<input type="radio"/>	TRAUMATIC EVENT	<input type="radio"/>	LONELY
<input type="radio"/>	OUT WITH FRIENDS	<input type="radio"/>	UPSET
<input type="radio"/>	DIVORCE	<input type="radio"/>	BORED
<input type="radio"/>	TRAVELLING	<input type="radio"/>	TIRE
<input type="radio"/>	LACK OF SLEEP	<input type="radio"/>	SAD
<input type="radio"/>	MISUNDERSTANDING	<input type="radio"/>	STRESSED
<input type="radio"/>	LOSS OF JOB	<input type="radio"/>	AGITATED
<input type="radio"/>	FINANCIAL STRAIN	<input type="radio"/>	UNWELL
<input type="radio"/>	LATE NIGHTS	<input type="radio"/>	INJURED
<input type="radio"/>	WORK PRESSURE	<input type="radio"/>	ANGRY
<input type="radio"/>	PARTIES	<input type="radio"/>	HEARTBROKEN




# The Brain Game

If you give in to temptation and taste forbidden pleasures (to compensate for your pain), your brain will try to convince you that this ongoing pleasure is needed for survival. Through this deceptive process, unhealthy habits are formed. Should you ever wish to exercise positive freedom and put limitations or restrictions on your pleasure-seeking habits, a tug-of-war between your thoughts and feelings may follow. The first step in winning the tug-of-war brain game, is to become aware of any problematic pleasure-seeking behaviours you may engage in response to emotional discomfort.



**How do you respond to emotional discomfort? Do these behaviours help or hinder you? ✓**

Perceived pain	Your typical behavioural response to achieve pleasure (whether reward or relief)	Help	Hinder
Hungry	<i>Example: look in fridge, snack on chocolate or crisps</i>		
Lonely			
Heartbroken			
Sad			
Unwell			
Upset			
Headache			
Stressed			
Anxious			
Angry			
Bored			
Agitated			
Injured			
Tired			



**When you  
change it,  
withdraw from  
it or stop it,  
you also have  
to replace it.**

Because unwanted or unhealthy habits are reinforced by reward or relief, stopping a particular behaviour creates an emotional void that needs filling. This is why when giving up one 'bad habit' many simply go on to take up another. To tap into HIGH FREEDOM, habits that hurt, hamper or hinder need to be intentionally replaced with new functional habits that HELP you.

# Favour the Functional

The second step in winning the tug-of-war brain game is to replace problematic response with new functional and healthy pleasure-producing habits. Of course, the moment you deny your brain the pleasure response it's accustomed to, it will likely want to throw a tantrum. However, instead of saying 'no' to the problematic response, simply say 'not yet'. First, engage a new functional behavioural response that elicits a pleasure alternative.



**When responding to emotional discomfort, what pleasure-based behaviour could you engage that would be more functional than your typical way of responding?**

Perceived pain	Functional behavioural response to achieve pleasure (whether reward or relief)
Hungry	<i>Example: Enjoy a protein shake, muesli bar or piece of your favourite fruit</i>
Lonely	
Heartbroken	
Sad	
Unwell	
Upset	
Headache	
Stressed	
Anxious	
Angry	
Bored	
Agitated	
Injured	
Tired	