Fighting the Urge
CHANGE UNWANTED BEHAVIORS ONCE AND FOR ALL

Relate to your addictions, compulsions, and habits in a way that literally changes your brain

dr.amyjohnson
psychologist. life coach.
Permissions

My intention for this work is that it is widely shared with as many people as possible. Please feel free to reprint, publish, and share any part of this e-book with anyone who you think might benefit from it.

If you do, please include the following with any portion you reprint:
Reprinted with permission from the author, Dr. Amy Johnson (www.DrAmyJohnson.com)

© 2013 Amy Johnson
www.DrAmyJohnson.com
Amy@DrAmyJohnson.com

Much of the content and structure of this e-book follows Kathryn Hansen’s Brain Over Binge: Why I was Bulimic, Why Conventional Therapy didn’t Work, and How I Recovered for Good. Please consider that book the primary resource for this e-book.

(This ebook was edited by my friend and editor extraordinaire, Lynn Hess.)
About Me

I’m a master certified life coach, author, fear-tamer, mom, recovering control freak, social psychologist, and public speaker.

I’ve taught university-level psychology and consulted on several high-profile court cases. I’ve spoken to audiences around the US and Canada about success and happiness and sailed completely around the globe.

I work with clients all over the world via telephone and online coaching programs. If you’re interested in learning more about the outside-in nature of life and getting out of your own way so that you can have a more joyful experience on this planet, I can help. I’d love to help.


I’m a regular expert on The Steve Harvey Show and am often interviewed by the Wall Street Journal, Self Magazine, and Oprah.com.

To read my regularly updated blog or learn more about coaching, please visit me at www.DrAmyJohnson.com
Fighting the Urge

This course is called *Fighting the Urge* but there will be no fighting here. Not anymore.

“Fighting the urge” might describe the way you used to do things. My guess is that you’ve been trying to “fight” your urges for a long time.

You’ve been using willpower, positive self-talk, or your sheer stubbornness to no avail.

The tools you’ll learn through this e-book and the corresponding recordings include no fighting, because what you fight grows stronger.

You’re going to learn how to interact with urges to do your habit or compulsion in a brand new, peaceful way that has nothing to do with fighting or resistance or willpower or white knuckling your way through.

See if you can allow this to be easy. I have no idea if it will be for you—everyone’s experience is different. But see if you can allow for the possibility that it *might be* easy. It may not be the struggle you’ve come to expect.

---

You’re going to learn how to interact with urges to do your habit or compulsion in a brand new, peaceful way that has nothing to do with fighting or resistance or willpower or white knuckling your way through.

---

You have everything you need

I’ve used the principles in this ebook with dozens of my private clients on behavioral compulsions such as drinking, overeating, shopping, and constant email and Facebook checking, as well as on intrusive mental thoughts such as approval-seeking and irrational fears.

There is nothing special about the people who have ended their compulsions with these methods—they don’t have any skills or characteristics that you don’t have.

All you need is the willingness to change. Be open to what you’re about to learn and try it out for yourself. That’s all it takes.
How to get the most from this information

You may get a lot out of browsing through this book alone, but it is meant to be a supplement to the three 60-minute audios that go along with it. I recommend you listen to the audios and keep this book as an additional resource.

A note about terms

I'm going to use a few terms interchangeably to describe that “thing you do.” I'll call it a compulsion, an addiction, and a habit, from time to time. Some of those terms may feel more accurate for your “thing” than others, but see if you can substitute these terms for each other without getting too caught up in labels.

Because the science and methods you're going to learn apply to all sorts of unwanted behaviors, I'll use a variety of examples as well. Many of the examples will revolve around eating and drinking, as those are some of the traditional habits that come to mind. I'll also use examples around checking behaviors (such as compulsively checking email or checking to make sure the iron is turned off), and behaviors like shopping or working.

Mentally substitute in your unwanted behavior for the examples I use and remember that the principles you'll learn apply to an extremely wide range of mental and behavioral habits.
Resources and Credits

The information in this ebook and the accompanying recordings comes from three primary sources:

1. **Brain over Binge: Why I Was Bulimic, Why Conventional Therapy Didn’t Work, and How I Recovered for Good** by Kathryn Hansen

   This is the story of the author’s 8 year struggle with severe bulimia and how she recovered for good—almost immediately—after learning the principles you’re about to learn.

   I *highly* recommend this book, especially if your compulsion is around food or another substance. The author explains these ideas in a way that’s extremely easy to follow and understand—a way I have borrowed for much of this e-book.


   Rational Recovery is an addiction recovery method on which these principles are based, and on which Kathryn Hansen’s book *Brain over Binge* is based.

   Success rates with Rational Recovery are significantly higher than with traditional addiction treatment. I highly recommend this book if you have ever tried traditional addiction treatment and it didn’t work for you (such as the Alcoholics Anonymous model).

3. **You Are Not Your Brain: The 4-Step Solution for Changing Bad Habits, Ending Unhealthy Thinking, and Taking Control of Your Life** by Jeffrey Schwartz

   Jeffery Schwartz is a world-renowned neuroscientist whose research, especially with obsessive-compulsive disorder, provides the scientific basis for the ideas you’ll read about here. His work has shown time and time again that relating to your compulsion or addiction in a more mindful way, using the steps you’re about to learn, is as effective as medication. His research also provides evidence for how the brain physically changes when you relate to your compulsion in this way.

   I recommend this book if you want a more general overview of these principles that you can apply to any habit, compulsion, or addiction.
What is a compulsion?

For our purposes, let’s define a compulsion as “an irresistible urge to behave in a certain way, especially in a way that goes against your conscious wishes.”

An important part of this definition is the tension between the urge and “your conscious wishes.” The types of compulsions we’ll be talking about are things you feel driven to do, but that you don’t want to do.

Part of you wants more than anything to stop, and another part of you feels powerless to stop.

The mainstream view of compulsions and addictions

The traditional therapy model says that our compulsions and addictions are attempts to fill some deep—often hidden—emotional void. Compulsions and addictions are thought to be complicated problems that are the consequence of even deeper problems.

The mainstream addiction model says that your addiction is a disease. This view claims that even if your behaviors change and you never drink, overeat, or gamble again, you’ll always have the disease.

When you’re told over and over by well-meaning professionals that your compulsion is how you cope with an emotional void (as in the first model), it’s natural to find yourself on a quest for fulfillment. You’re left trying to fill a buried, inner need that you can’t identify and didn’t even know you had.

You’re left trying to solve what feels like a puzzle. Since you can’t put your finger on what’s missing, perhaps the answer to this riddle is buried deep in your subconscious? Of course, that typically means that it will take years of traditional therapy to uncover the answer and solve the riddle, if it’s solvable at all.

This viewpoint sets you on a scavenger hunt for triggers. You’re told the problem has origins deep within you, but you’re also told to look outside of yourself for the external conditions that trigger your behavior.

Hunting for triggers is a slippery slope because the triggers aren’t consistent. One day you binge eat when you’re alone, the next day you binge eat after hanging out with friends. This week you
compulsively shopped after a horrible day at work, but last week you did it on your day off. One day feeling nervous leads you to drink, but then the next time you feel nervous you don’t drink. Chasing triggers and trying to make sense of them becomes a full-time job in which you are constantly focused on and relating everything in your life to your habit.

On the other hand, in the second model you’re left believing you have an incurable disease. Your disease is part of who you are, it’s in your DNA, and even if your behaviors stop you’ll always be an addict.

This view means you won’t ever escape the label of addict (but you can escape responsibility, because this is an incurable, unchangeable part of your biology).

Not surprisingly, and as you may have experienced, relapse rates in traditional addiction treatment and traditional therapy are huge. They vary greatly depending on the compulsion and the treatment, but they are generally upwards of 50%.

In the traditional addiction model, you won’t ever escape the label of addict but you are invited to escape responsibility, because your addiction is an incurable, unchangeable part of your biology.

A new approach

The approach we’re taking here is different. The methods you’re about to learn are based on neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity basically means that your brain can literally physically change by changing the way you think and behave.

We’re going to be talking strictly in terms of brain science here; not about hidden emotional needs or relying on a higher power or needing to become whole. I’m not here to judge those approaches or call them wrong—we’re simply setting those older approaches aside for now and looking to a new approach that is based on the latest brain science.

This conversation begins with some background about the structure and function of the brain. The graphic on page 22 may be a helpful visual resource.
The Higher Brain and the Lower Brain

For the purposes of our discussion, let’s separate the brain into two, over-simplified parts: the Higher Brain, which is located on the top of and toward the front of the brain, and the Lower Brain, which is located at the brainstem and underneath the largest part of the brain.

The Lower Brain

The Lower Brain is the oldest part of the brain. Most living creatures have this part of the brain—including reptiles—so it’s sometimes called the Reptilian Brain or the Animal Brain.

The Lower, Reptilian brain is where addictions, compulsions, and habits live. The Lower Brain is slow and habitual. It is non-thinking. It has absolutely no capability for logic or reason or any kind of higher intelligence. The Lower Brain takes note of and acts out patterns—it acts like an extremely rudimentary machine.

The Lower Brain is also where the flight-or-fight response originates; it is responsible for maintaining basic biological functions and ensuring our survival. The Lower Brain generates survival drives for food, water, oxygen, and anything it believes is essential to survive.

Survival urges

When you have an addiction, compulsion, or deeply ingrained habit, the Lower Brain believes that the substance or behavior is necessary for your survival and therefore produces strong urges for the substance or behavior.

If your compulsion is gambling, the urge to gamble is strong. It can almost feel like a life-or-death situation. If your habit is smoking, it can literally feel like you will die if you don’t get a cigarette. This is because your habit lives in your Lower Brain—the same place your survival instincts live.

Urges are nothing more than messages from the Lower Brain to “do the thing.” Eat the food, bite the nails, be afraid when you’re in a group of people, buy the shoes. The Lower Brain gets its needs met through urges or messages it sends that say: Give me my thing now!
Addictive Voice

These urges are sometimes called the Addictive Voice.

The Addictive Voice is the voice that urges you to follow through on your compulsion. In Rational Recovery (an addiction treatment that is based on these methods), they define the Addictive Voice as “any idea, feeling, or behavior that supports [your addiction].”

The thing to know about the Addictive Voice is that it is not “you.” You are not it, and it is not you. I know—it sounds an awful lot like you. It speaks to you in what sounds like your own voice. Its urgency convinces you that it is real and important and acting on your behalf. But it’s not.

Urges to obey your compulsion (the Addictive Voice) are only the Lower Brain speaking. It’s the animal brain—steeped in survival and habit, non-thinking, not logical, rigid, and old, simply telling you what it believes you need for your survival.

Again, it’s telling you what it believes you need for your survival.

Why it feels like you are of two minds

Thoughts and feelings that encourage your compulsion are the Addictive Voice. Thoughts and feelings that encourage you to get treatment, or that want you to be rid of this ridiculous compulsion, are the conscious, thinking, rational, intelligent part of you.
This is why it so often feels like “you” are being controlled by something that’s not truly you. That’s exactly what’s happening. The thinking, logical, smart part of you doesn’t want to keep living this way. But the animal part of you—the Lower Brain—believes your survival depends on it.

**Just like an alarm clock**

The animal brain is like a non-thinking machine simply outputting programmed messages. It’s as personal as your alarm clock going off.

Your alarm clock might be annoying, and it might arouse emotion in you, and you might get to a point where you’ll do pretty much anything to silence the damn thing. But it’s not personal. You set it and it goes off, period.

Your urges are the same. Your brain was wired to produce urges and it does. They aren’t personal.

When you can *Recognize* and *Separate Yourself* from your Addictive Voice—in other words, when you realize your urges aren’t you and they are only messages from the machine-like part of your brain—recovery is effortless.

*When you can Recognize and Separate Yourself from your Addictive Voice, recovery is effortless.*

**The Higher Brain**

The Higher Brain is also sometimes called the Human Brain, your Real Self, or the Mind. The Higher Brain is responsible for consciousness, your sense of identity, logic and rational thought, memory, intelligence, and voluntary motor behavior.

To stop obeying your urges for your compulsion, it’s important to understand that your Lower Brain cannot *make* you do anything because it doesn’t have control over your voluntary muscles. Your Higher Brain—where decisions are made—is ultimately in charge of your actions.

The Higher Brain is the part of you that *acts on* the urges of the Lower Brain.
The Lower Brain can’t light a cigarette or walk to the refrigerator. Only the Higher Brain can do those things. The Lower Brain can only send the messages, trying to convince the Higher Brain that giving into the urge is necessary to your survival. But it’s not, of course.

The Higher Brain is the part of you that chooses what to do with those urges from the Lower Brain. It is a choice. It may not always feel like a choice, but ultimately, it is.

I’m not talking about choice as in “just don’t do it.” If you could “just stop,” you would have by now. This is not about overriding the urges with willpower or brute force. Just the opposite, actually.

How you’ll stop obeying the urges

You will ultimately choose not to obey the Lower Brain commands because you’re coming to understand that they are simply misguided, survival-based programming. They are old, conditioned responses that are irrelevant today.

I bet that if you think about it, you’ll see that one of the main reasons you give into your urges is that giving into the urge makes it go away. Urges can be extremely uncomfortable. They appear to signal a legitimate need and you mistakenly believe they are your desires.

The good news is that you don’t have to obey the urges to get them to go away. It may have felt that way in the past, but that was before you understood the true nature of urges. The urges will go away on their own when you see them for what they are and stop obeying them.

In my experience and the experience of many of my clients, shortly after you stop obeying the urges they take on a different quality. They don’t seem as serious or as urgent. It’s easier to notice them and see through them, and there is a lag between when the urge strikes and when you find yourself jumping into action.

The urges become less and less urgent and less and less frequent, and then, one day, they simply stop.
Obeying the urge is the only “problem”

As we’ve discussed, your compulsion isn’t due to anything “wrong” with you or anything missing from your life. It’s not due to a deep, unmet psychological need and it’s not a puzzle you have to solve.

You don’t have your addiction or habit because you were abused as a child or because you don’t love yourself enough.

This approach is purely brain-based. *The only reason you have your addiction is because you obey your urges.*

The *urge to* drink, eat, shut people out, or wash your hands is the *cause of* drinking, eating, shutting people out, or washing your hands. The compulsion is simply a way of dealing with the urge.

Without the urge, you wouldn’t do your compulsion, right?

---

**The only reason you have your addiction is because you obey your urges.**

---

Choice

You have full control over your actions and you have a choice in how you relate to your urges.

You aren’t going to *make* your urges go away; you’re only going to see them as so unimportant that it truly doesn’t matter if they are there or not. Then, you stop obeying them and they go away.

---

Reversing the habit and rewiring your brain
Your brain is wired to produce urges because you’ve acted on those urges many times in the past. As soon as you stop acting on the urges, you rewire your neural circuitry and the urges stop.

Here’s an example: Let’s say your compulsion is food. When you’ve heard the urge from your Lower Brain to eat large quantities of unhealthy food in the past, you’ve obeyed that urge and followed through—probably many, many times in your life.

Each time you do this, you strengthen the habit in your brain. What you practice becomes fixed, and your brain literally changes to support the behavior. This is how a habit is formed.

Given that repeated practice is how you created this habit in your brain to begin with, it makes sense that you will reverse it by not acting on the urge many times. When you do that, you’re teaching your brain that the habit is no longer necessary.

You can’t reason with the Lower Brain. It’s a non-thinking, unintelligent machine, and it has no ability to understand reason. So you can’t talk your brain out of your habit by trying to convince yourself that the urges are ridiculous or by talking back to the urges or pleading with them to leave you alone. *All of that attention actually reinforces the urges and makes them stronger.* Attention and emotion are neural super glue. What you focus on is strengthened.

Given that repeated practice obeying your urges is how you created this problem, repeated practice ignoring your urges is how you will change it.

Instead, the urges will go away by you repeatedly not paying attention to or acting on them.

**Four Steps**

There are 4 steps below that are, essentially, the steps you’ll take to change your habit and rewire your brain.

These steps are a mashup of steps discussed by sources I cite on page 6—most notably, Kathryn Hansen’s book *Brain over Binge* and Jeffery Schwartz’s book *You Are Not Your Brain*.

Schwartz’s research with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) patients showed that patients benefitted as much from practicing a version of these four steps as they did from medication.
Step #1: View your urges as neurological junk. This is also referred to as Re-labeling.

This means you stop believing your urges signal a real physical or emotional need—you see that they are insignificant. You view them as automatic brain messages generated in your Lower Brain that deserve no attention.

You re-label those urges as meaningless signals coming from a non-thinking, unintelligent machine-like part of your brain. They are old and meaningless. In other words, they are neurological junk.

The urges are no different than the alarm clock you may have set for 6am last week. Maybe this week you don't need to get up until 7am, but if the alarm is still set to go off at 6, it will.

It’s not personal when the alarm goes off at 6. It’s not “wrong”—that’s how it was set. But it’s also not relevant to your life this week. It’s not helpful or necessary. It’s simply old programming.

Step #2: Separate your highest human brain from your urges. This is also referred to as Reframing.

This means you realize the urges aren't really you; they are simply Lower Brain-based messages. The you that has a personal identity, makes conscious decisions, is smart, and has opinions and preferences and dreams is something altogether different.

Your urges are powerless to make you act. Action happens in the Higher Brain, not the Lower Brain.

Any thought or feeling that tells you to obey an urge is only the Addictive Voice. It’s not threatening or important in any way. You are reframing your urges by seeing them as not you.

Step #3: Stop reacting to your urges. This is also referred to as Revaluing.
In step three, you stop giving your urges attention and allowing them to affect you emotionally. You view them as neurological junk, with no judgment or emotion attached.

They aren’t you, they can’t hurt you, and they aren’t personal, so there is simply no place for emotion. You revalue them—they are something to dismiss, not something to focus on.

Fighting against them and trying to figure them out has made them stronger over time. The perfect approach to an urge is an emotion-less, judgment-less, “I notice you, but I’m choosing to ignore you.”

Step #4: Stop acting on your urges. This is also referred to as Refocusing.

When you stop acting on our urges, your brain rewires around the new normal of not acting on your urges.

Urges to give into your habit will taper off quickly once you stop acting on them. By not acting on your urges, you physically change your brain. Those associations weaken and die off when they aren’t reinforced by following your urge.

That’s it

You may have noticed that it’s a bit of a stretch to consider these four unique steps.

Steps 1-3 are essentially the same thing, each with a slightly different twist. They all come down to the basic idea: Your urges are junk—they aren’t you—so you can safely disregard them.

Step 4 is the obvious result of truly seeing the truth in steps 1-3.

You may have also noticed that these steps don’t actually give you much to do. In fact, there is nothing to do. Ending your compulsion is much more about not doing—just being—than doing.

The Bonus Step
In her book *Brain over Binge*, Kathryn Hansen names 5 steps she used to stop her compulsive binge eating. The 5th step was getting excited.

**Excitement is the bonus step.**

Remember, emotion and focus are neural super glue. This is why we don’t want to reason with or get all upset about the urges—it cements them into place. Emotion and focus can work in your favor when you’re forming the *new* habit of *not* doing your compulsion. Your new normal is that you feel the urge, call it neurological junk, and move on, not giving into it. When you successfully do that, praising yourself and getting excited about your progress cements that new normal into place.

Praise makes change faster. This just feels true, doesn’t it? It’s why we cheer on babies who are learning to walk—it motivates them to keep going, makes them proud of themselves along the way, and makes the new habit become more quickly cemented into place.

---

**Getting excited and praising yourself makes change faster.**

---

**Using these steps with mental habits**

Throughout this ebook and in the recordings, I’ve used very classic, clear-cut examples of compulsions and addictions.

The examples I’ve used tend to have very cut-and-dried behaviors associated with them, which make them easy to identify. If your compulsion always ends in you being drunk, out a few hundred dollars, or wasting several hours of your day, you know when you’ve obeyed the urge. The consequences and actions are crystal clear.

But that’s not always the case. These principles can also be applied to mental habits that are less obvious or easily defined.

---

**Fears and Preoccupations**

**Fears** (like public speaking, being in crowded places, or driving over bridges) and **preoccupations** (such as concerns like “I’m going to fail at this,” “I’m not..."
“good enough,” and “What do they think of me?”) are two types of mental habits that can be changed using the knowledge you now have.

In the above examples, the loud and persistent thought that says, “There is something to be afraid of here,” or “You aren’t right,” is the equivalent of an urge. It’s essentially the same thing as an urge—a belief that was wired in your Lower Brain at some point. It’s a thought to which you likely devoted some attention and emotion, which then cemented it into place and made it look and feel very real.

Then, you started acting on it which cemented it into place even further. You may hear the thought (urge): “You’re going to die on this bridge,” or “Who do you think you are? No one likes you!” and you modify your behavior accordingly. That’s giving into the urge.

You can rewire your brain around these mental habits in the exact ways we’ve been talking about. You can hear that familiar thought (urge) and separate yourself from it. Know that it’s not you, it’s not true, and that your survival—physical or emotional—isn’t at stake, even if it feels as if it is.

Then, go on with your business. The more you meet those thoughts with no emotion (remembering that they are only neurological junk), and you less you act on them, the faster they extinguish.

You can rewire your brain around mental habits such as fears and preoccupations in the ways we’ve been talking about.

If you have urges in the future...

A very common thought at this point is: “It can’t be this simple.”

That “looking over your shoulder” feeling, waiting for your habit to sneak back up on you, is totally normal.

If you’ve stopped doing your compulsion in the past only to start it up again, it makes perfect sense that you’d be skeptical.

Relapse is what traditional therapy and addiction treatment lead us to expect. In traditional therapy, I was told that my issues would probably be with me my whole life but that I could learn to “manage” them.

Relapse rates in traditional therapy and addiction are astronomical.
But this is different.

Your habit is gone because your brain has changed

As you stop acting on your urges, your brain literally changes to support your new habit. Just like it changed to support your old habit, it will change to support the absence of your habit, or your new normal.

Once you haven’t acted on your urges in a long time and your brain has rewired, the issue is essentially gone. At some point, brain scans tend to show no evidence of it. It’s simply not there anymore.

When you learn to view your urges as neurological junk, give them no attention, and practice not obeying them, relapse is unlikely for two reasons:

1) The process literally, physically changes your brain so that the addiction or habit is no longer present in your brain.

2) You know exactly what to do if an urge does come up in the future, so you don’t fall back into the pattern of acting on the urges.

When you quit via willpower, the habit is strengthened (due to attention and focus) rather than weakened, so number 1 above is not true. Number 2 above is also not true because the only way you know to cope is through willpower.

In mainstream addiction treatment, you are told repeatedly that you are powerless over your addiction. Your only hope of recovery is to rely on a higher power.

When this is the case, it makes a lot of sense that if you do obey an urge one day, you will be likely to give in or give up because you’re told you are an addict for life anyway and you have no power over your addiction, the “disease” is part of who you are, and you don’t know that you have the option of seeing this as nothing more than following an urge. A “relapse” (following an urge one day) looks important and ominous. Of course, it isn’t.

The truth is that you can obey an urge one day, know that all that happened is that you obeyed an urge, remind yourself that urges are only neurological junk, and move on.
The Bigger Message

You’re reading this ebook because you want to change a bad habit. But there is a much bigger message in everything you’ve learned here.

It’s that you are not those urges because you are not your thoughts at all.

We all have thought. Our entire experience of life is filtered through thought. But you are not those thoughts in your head.

Thought is sort of like the eyeglasses you might wear. It’s a filter. You are experiencing life through the filter of your glasses and, much of the time, you forget you’re wearing glasses. Your view of life appears to simply be “what is.”

When you don’t know that you are seeing the world through a filter, you take each fleeting thought as truth: the urges, the happy thoughts, the annoying thoughts, the random neutral thoughts—they all can look like “what is.”

The alternative as I’ve talked about in this ebook is that you can detach and be aware of the presence and nature of thought. You can choose to not identify with your thoughts, just like you’re choosing to not identify with your urges.

When you notice and separate yourself from your thoughts, life takes on a markedly easier, more joyful quality.

When you quit via willpower, you often strengthen the habit in your brain rather than weaken it. By ignoring the urge repeatedly, they truly go away.

When you’re aware there is an often cloudy, extremely subjective filter covering your view of life, it’s much easier to take things in stride. Just like when you’re aware that an urge is just neurological junk. There’s no reason to act.

You’re resilient. You bounce back because things that used to look serious just aren’t that serious. Things don’t bother you to the same extent or for quite as long.

This is the basis for living in peace.

When you notice and separate yourself from your urges, recovery is effortless.
When you notice and separate yourself from your other thoughts as well, life takes on a markedly easier, more joyful quality.

Please let me know how I can support you

It wasn't a coincidence that you happened upon this material and I sincerely hope that it brings you peace. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if there is anything I can ever do help you understand these ideas or apply them to your own life. I would love to hear from you.

www.DrAmyJohnson.com
Amy@DrAmyJohnson.com
The Frontal Lobe (Prefrontal Cortex) = Higher Brain (Human/Mind/"Real Self"). This is where conscious choice and motor movements originate.

The Brainstem + Cerebellum = Lower ("Animal"/Reptilian) Brain. This is where habits are formed and where urges originate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher Brain</th>
<th>Lower Brain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conscious choice</td>
<td>Automatic behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic, reasoning</td>
<td>Habit, reflexes, instincts, irrational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor activity</td>
<td>No motor activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separates humans from other animals</td>
<td>Present in animals and humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick, adaptive, flexible, shallow</td>
<td>Slow, rigid, deep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 4 Steps

#1. View your urges as “neurological junk” (Re-label)

Stop believing the urges signal a real physical or emotional need and stop assigning them any value or significance.

View them as automatic brain messages generated in your Lower Brain that deserve no attention. They are coming from a programmed machine—no different than your alarm clock or screensaver.

#2. Separate your Higher (human) Brain from your urges (Reframe)

Realize the urges aren’t really you; your true self if much more than the animal, Lower Brain. Your Higher (human) Brain gives you the ability to ignore the urges.

Your urges are powerless to make you act. Your Higher Brain, not your Lower Brain, has complete control over your voluntary actions.

The urges are no longer threatening because you are “above” them, metaphorically and in terms of brain structure.

#3. Stop reacting to your urges (Revalue)

Stop letting your urges affect you emotionally. Simply let them come and go without getting wrapped up in them. This makes the urges tolerable and rather easy to resist.

Fear, frustration, fighting against them, talking back to them, and trying to reason with or figure them out has made them stronger over time.

They aren’t you, they can’t hurt you without your input, and they aren’t personal. It is safe to ignore them.

#4. Stop acting on your urges (Refocus)

When you stop obeying the urges, your brain rewires around a new normal of not acting on the urges.

Your urges will taper off quickly once you stop acting on them.