

# **‘Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence’**

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[...]

Self-binding [or ‘increasing friction’] is [to] ... intentionally and willingly create barriers between ourselves and our drug of choice in order to mitigate compulsive overconsumption

[...]

## **Physical Self-Binding**

[...]

one form of self-binding is to create literal physical barriers and/or geographical distance between ourselves and our drug of choice

[...]

But ... self-binding is no guarantee. Sometimes the barrier itself becomes an invitation to a challenge. Solving the puzzle of how to get our drug of choice becomes part of its appeal

[...]

## **Chronological Self-Binding**

Another form of self-binding is the use of time limits and finish lines. By restricting consumption to certain times of the day, week, month, or year, we narrow our window of consumption and thereby limit our use. For example, we can tell ourselves we’ll consume only on holidays, only on weekends, never before Thursday, never before 5:00 p.m., and so on.

Sometimes, rather than time per se, we bind ourselves based on milestones or accomplishments. We’ll wait till our birthday, or as soon as we complete an assignment, or after we get our degree, or once we get the promotion. When the clock has run down, or we’ve crossed a self-designated finish line, the drug is our reward.

Neuroscientists S. H. Ahmed and George Koob have shown that rats given unlimited access to cocaine for six hours per day gradually increase their lever-pressing over time to the point of physical exhaustion and even death. Increased self-administration under extended access conditions (six hours) has also been observed with methamphetamine, nicotine, heroin, and alcohol.

However, rats who have access to cocaine for only one hour per day use steady amounts of cocaine over many consecutive days. That is, they don't press the lever for more drug per unit time with each consecutive day.

This study suggests that by restricting drug consumption to a narrow window of time, we may be able to moderate our use and avoid the compulsive and escalating consumption that comes with unlimited access.

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Just tracking how much time we spend consuming, for example, by clocking our smartphone use, is one way to become aware of and thereby mitigate consumption. When we make conscious use of objective facts like how much time we're using, we are less able to deny them, and therefore in a better position to take action.

[...]

### **Categorical Self-Binding**

[...]

Categorical self-binding limits consumption by sorting dopamine into different categories: those subtypes we allow ourselves to consume, and those we do not.

This method helps us to avoid not only our drug of choice but also the triggers that lead to craving for our drug. This strategy is especially useful for substances we can't eliminate altogether but that we're trying to consume in a healthier way, like food, sex, and smartphones

[...]

Categorical self-binding fails when we inadvertently include a trigger in our list of acceptable activities. We can correct mistakes like these with a mental sifting process based on experience.