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Dopamine Trap Worksheet

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that plays a key role in *cravings*. Dopamine is part of the prehistoric (or reptilian) reward center of your brain and this part of your brain is focused on one thing – keeping you alive.

As a result, dopamine doesn't make you feel good; it makes you feel like you're just *about* to feel good. The promise of happiness – not the actual experience of happiness – is the brain's strategy to keep you hunting, gathering, and working so you stay alive. Dopamine is there to get you to ACT and to REPEAT behaviors associated with staying alive (e.g. eating high-calorie foods, feeling connected to the "tribe" on social media, accumulating resources via gambling or shopping).

When you're in the Dopamine Trap, satisfaction is elusive. You might eat something sugary or spend half an hour scrolling through Instagram or buy a new pair of shoes, but rather than feeling happy and relaxed, you feel like you just want MORE.

Try this 2-step strategy to avoid and/or resist the Dopamine Trap:

STEP ONE: Notice the gap between what the behavior promised and what it delivered

Become more mindful of when the dopamine receptors in the reward center of your brain are calling the shots and making you *believe* that something is going to make you feel amazing, but will actually leave you feeling frustrated, guilty, anxious and just wanting more.

There is growing evidence that when people pay close attention to the experience of false reward, the magic spell wears off. If you force your brain to reconcile what it *expects* from a reward (happiness, bliss, satisfaction) with what it *actually* experiences (guilt, shame, anxiety) your brain will eventually adjust its expectations.

So, when you give in to a craving, instead of beating yourself up and promising to do better next time, spend some time sitting with, and really absorbing, how you feel. Simply notice that part of your brain thought that doing would feel really satisfying but it actually feels unsatisfying and even a little anxiety-inducing.

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How I imagined the food/behavior would make me feel:

How it actually made me feel:

STEP TWO: Seek out serotonin-boosting activities

Serotonin is another neurotransmitter, but unlike dopamine, it actually *does* create feelings of satisfaction, contentment, and happiness.

Pay attention to the things in your life that release serotonin in your brain and actually DO make you feel good (these will be different for everyone).

These are usually things like spending time with people you love, exercise, being outdoors, yoga, reading, creative arts, etc. They may not be as exciting for your brain as those activities that release dopamine, but they actually DO lead to deep feelings of happiness and satisfaction – the reptilian part of your brain just doesn't know it yet.

List 5 activities that you know make you feel happy and satisfied:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

What can you do right now to start spending a bit more time each day or week doing one or more of these activities?

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This is just one step in the right direction.

It gives you a bigger picture of why it feels so challenging to break habits that we know are not serving our best selves.

Let me help you break it down into manageable pieces.

We'll sit down and set up your bigger picture and goals, then talk about where to start today with the small steps.

Yes, it will be work on your part, but we'll keep our eyes focused on the goal. Finding the feeling of freedom from 'I know I shouldn't be doing this' and that after feeling of blah.

Let's live better lives. We are worth it!

Packages start at $45/week, with a typical program lasting 8 weeks.

I work with screen time habits, food choices, movement health, sleep routines, comfort shopping, and persistent pain.

Contact Amber:

amber@criticalmovement.org

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