

What are the odds of tossing a coin ten times and it landing heads up each time, I can't remember how you work out such odds but you could safely bet that they would be astronomical.

But suppose you have just tossed a coin nine times and it landed heads up each time, what are the odds of it coming up heads one more time? The answer is fifty-fifty, so it could be worth placing a bet if the bookie is giving you astronomical odds. The reason for the fifty-fifty odds is that the coin tosses in the past have no bearing on what the coin will do in the future (unless of course it's a two headed coin!)

So what about more important aspects of life? "I managed to give up smoking for three weeks. But then the car wouldn't start, I was late for work and my boss gave me a hard time. So I lit one up and that was that. I've been back smoking ever since." Here it is assumed that tossing a "heads" once determines what will happen in the future. You might be amazed by how many times I have heard stories like this, but then again when you think back to your past, maybe you wouldn't!

It is certainly easier when faced with a tough decision to take the soft option, then to blame it on something over which you have no control. "I can't help it, it's just how I am, I've always been like that." "It must be genetic." Or possibly "it's just fate."

We have all done things that on reflection we wish we hadn't. It might have been lighting a cigarette, eating that cream cake, shouting at your children, falling out with a loved one, or even something as simple as not saying "thank-you" when someone held a door open for you.

The fact that we made a mistake once doesn't mean we are doomed to keep making the same mistake. While it is easy to



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fall into habitual patterns of behaviour, as creatures with a conscience and free will we always have the option to take the better option, even if it is the tougher one. Taking the more challenging option, even just once, makes it much easier to do it again. Until Roger Bannister's record-breaking run, no human being in history had ever run a mile in less than four minutes. But in the year after Bannister's run, eighteen people ran a four-minute mile. Behave in a better way twice and it gets even easier, before you know it, this improved way of living is your new habit. The most important thing to remember is that the past doesn't equal the future. Every time you are faced with a choice, you get the chance afresh to make a good one. What you have already done can't be changed, but life, and the chance to do something good with it, always happens now. So when would now be a good time to change?

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