

Let's talk about...

Quitting Smoking

MENTAL ILLNESS DEMYSTIFIED

IF YOU SMOKE AND WOULD LIKE TO IMPROVE YOUR LIFE AND HEALTH, THEN YOU PROBABLY KNOW THE BEST THING YOU COULD DO FOR YOURSELF IS TO QUIT. CHANCES ARE YOU'VE THOUGHT ABOUT QUITTING AND PERHAPS HAVE TRIED AND FAILED ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION. SMOKING IS VERY ADDICTIVE AND QUITTING TAKES CONSIDERABLE DETERMINATION AND SUPPORT. HOWEVER, MANY, MANY PEOPLE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY QUIT FOR GOOD — YOU MAY KNOW A FEW OF THESE PEOPLE. THE GOOD NEWS IS, THE MINUTE YOU STOP SMOKING, YOUR BODY WILL BEGIN CLEANSING ITSELF OF TOBACCO TOXINS. TWO DAYS AFTER YOU QUIT, YOUR RISK OF HEART ATTACK WILL START DECREASING... AND THAT'S JUST THE BEGINNING!

“Quitting smoking is easy. I've done it a thousand times.” Mark Twain said that and many smokers are sure to agree with him. Undoubtedly, quitting, and staying that way, may be one of the hardest things you'll ever do. It requires careful planning, courage, discipline, and commitment.

Why is quitting and staying quit so hard for many people? The answer is nicotine. Nicotine is a drug found naturally in tobacco. It's as addictive as heroin or cocaine. Over time, people become physically and emotionally addicted to nicotine. Many studies have shown that in order to quit and stay quit, smokers must deal with both their physical and psychological dependence.

Physically, the body reacts to the absence of nicotine. Mentally, the smoker is faced with giving up a habit which calls for a major change in behaviour. The physical symptoms, while annoying, are not life-threatening. Nicotine replacement and other medicines can help reduce many of these physical symptoms.

But most smokers find that the bigger challenge is the mental part of quitting. If you have been smoking for any length of time, smoking has become linked with nearly everything you do—waking up in the morning, eating, reading, watching TV, and drinking coffee. It takes time to “un-link” smoking from these activities. This is why, even if you are using a nicotine replacement, you may still have strong urges to smoke.

People who have smoked regularly for a few weeks or longer, and suddenly stop using tobacco or greatly reduce the amount smoked, will experience withdrawal symptoms. They can last from a few days to up to several weeks, and include any of the following:

- dizziness (which may only last 1 to 2 days after quitting)
- depression, anxiety, tiredness
- feelings of frustration, impatience, and anger
- sleep disturbances, including having trouble falling asleep and staying asleep, and having bad dreams or even nightmares
- trouble concentrating, restlessness, headaches
- increased appetite

These symptoms can lead the smoker to start smoking cigarettes again to boost blood levels of nicotine back to a level where there are no symptoms.

QUITTING

Smokers often say, “Don't tell me why to quit, tell me how.” There is no one right way to quit, but there are some key elements in quitting with success. Four factors are key: making the decision to quit; setting a quit date and choosing a quit plan; dealing with withdrawal; and, staying quit (maintenance).

Once you've decided to quit, pick a quit day within the next two to three weeks, a time that will not be particularly stressful. Next decide what method or combination of methods you want to use. These may include counselling, self-help guides, the patch and other medicines, hypnosis, and relaxation techniques.

It also helps to:

- List your reasons for quitting – health, family, monetary
- Write down the things that can replace smoking – exercise, a new hobby, etc.
- Speak with friends, family, and colleagues who can give you support. Tell them about your plan to quit, so it feels more real to you.
- Start making lifestyle changes that will support you – leave cigarettes at home when you go out, remove ashtrays from your home, etc.
- Consider joining a support group. Some people find it helpful to talk to others who are also trying to quit.
- To help you deal with withdrawal symptoms, try the 4-D Solutions: drink water, take deep breaths, delay reaching for a cigarette till the craving passes, do something different

Remember it takes at least three weeks to make a new habit. Don't be discouraged if you slip. Review your plan and ask yourself how you can do it differently next time. As you remain smoke-free, be sure to celebrate your success. Remember that quitting is process, not an event.



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