

Hope & Healing

Smoking How to Quit

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction

Smoking causes more damage to human health than any other habit. This fact has been well studied and is well publicized. There is simply no room for arguing otherwise.

Nearly half of all Americans who ever smoked have been convicted to give up the habit. About 1.3 million American smokers become ex-smokers each year. But, each day about 3,000 young people take up the habit.

The Three Poisons in Smoke

Gases, tars, and nicotine acting together cause most of the early deaths in smokers. Carbon monoxide is the most dangerous gas of all the gases in cigarette smoke. It attaches to red blood cells and blocks the transport of oxygen, causing shortness of breath, and poor hearing and vision.

The tars in cigarettes stick to lung cells and block the passage of oxygen into the blood stream. They are the actual cause of cancer.

Nicotine stimulates the brain to improve your mood, memory, concentration, and performance and relieves stress. This is the reason the cigarette habit is so hard to break. Smokers are asked to give up something they enjoy. The ones who quit, are the ones who value their physical health.

How Cigarettes Damage Health

- **Cancer** — A pack a day smoker is 14 times more likely to die

from cancer of the lungs, throat, and mouth than a non-smoker. Cancer of the bladder and esophagus are also higher in smokers.

- **Heart Disease** — A pack a day smoker is twice as likely to have a heart attack as a non-smoker, and is four times more likely to die from the heart attack within an hour.
- **Lung Problems** — Smokers cough more because the smoke damages the tiny hairs that clear the mucus from their bronchial tubes. They also have more colds, bronchitis, pneumonia, and emphysema, (the chronic lung disease caused by damaged air sacs).

The Benefits of Quitting

Even if you've been a smoker for many years your heart will forgive you if you quit. After two years much of the risk of a heart attack caused by smoking will have disappeared. In 5 to 10 years your risks of heart disease will be no greater than a non-smoker. The risks of lung cancer will go away after about 10 years of non-smoking. Your breathing will improve almost at once.

Nothing you do for your health — not even a low-fat diet, or an effective exercise program, will pay off like quitting smoking.

Why it is Hard to Quit

The power of nicotine is easy to underestimate. With your first cigarette of the day the inhaled nicotine gives you a sense of being on top of everything. Throughout the day your mind causes you to try to recreate that feeling again and again. So, after awhile you light up again. You may think you have control of your smoking, but your smoking has control of you. Your mind paces your use of cigarettes to recreate the effects of that first cigarette of the day.

But, it's not all just nicotine. When we're young we smoke to model ourselves after someone who's cool or one of the crowd, and that's the way we want to be. Or, we may smoke out of curiosity.

Smoking is enjoyable. The associations are enjoyable: playing cards, the end of work or of a class, or after a meal.

Most people who smoke want to quit. But, the habit is strong enough that nine out of ten of those still smoking have tried once to quit and failed. On the other hand, about 43 million people have succeeded — a sure sign that you can choose not to smoke.

The Keys to Quitting

Quitting is like learning to ride a bike. It may take more than one try. And, there are many methods. Nearly every method has worked for someone. Here are several suggestions:

1. You can go it alone or join a group. Most people do it on their own, but groups do help some

people — and you may be one of them. Locate a group by calling the local chapter of the American Cancer Society.

Caution: There is no scientific evidence that hypnosis, acupuncture, or “Total Immersion” systems work.

Whichever method you choose, ask in advance what it costs, what the dropout rate is, what percentage of people stay quit for a year, and if there is follow-up.

2. You can get help from your doctor with nicotine patches or gum. Eventually you have to kick the gum or patch habit, but some studies show a 30% success rate when a nicotine patch or gum and a support program are combined.
3. You can find a substitute for cigarettes: exercise, a hobby, social activities, deep breathing, or relaxation techniques.
4. Enlist your spouse or a friend to join you in quitting.

A Plan for Quitting on Your Own _____

You may want to try “cold turkey.” But wait. Let’s prepare. Begin a walking program. Walk for half an hour daily for a week. Set a date to quit about two weeks after you start your walks. Continue to walk. Switch to a brand that you don’t like, and reduce the number you smoke by half. For the final day:

- Choose a weekend when you are under very little stress, and have time to devote to yourself. Write the date that you are going to quit down here: _____
- Throw out all cigarettes, matches,

lighters, and ashtrays the evening before you quit.

- Visit the dentist and have the tobacco stains removed from your teeth.
- Steer clear of family members and friends who smoke.
- Plan lots of activity for you and your spouse or friend for the day you quit: go to stores, ride public transportation, visit a museum, theater, or restaurant where smoking is not permitted. Swim, jog. Walk, ride a bike, play tennis. Avoid any activity associated with smoking.

Withdrawal _____

The first week is hell because of headaches, constipation, drowsiness, sore mouth, inability to concentrate, mood swings, a desire to snack, and depression. But, you will not die.

After a week or two the worst is over. But you will still crave a cigarette. Brush your teeth, chew gum, use a lifesaver, chew more gum, do stretching, breathe deeply.

How to Quit Permanently _____

- If the thought of never smoking again is overwhelming, tell yourself that it is just for today.
- The first three months are dangerous. Avoid smokers. Avoid associations you used to have with smoking.
- Learn a relaxation technique. When the urge to smoke hits, relax.
- Be prepared for tough times by confiding in a friend how you feel. Tell yourself how proud you are for what you’ve done so far.

- If you fall off the wagon, don’t be ashamed. Quit again.

Summary _____

Newly created non-smokers are always pleased with the sense of mastery they have over having conquered a powerful habit. Just think, your sense of smell and taste are a keen source of pleasure. Your breathing is easier. And, most important, you have accomplished something that will add years to your life.