

# Ready to Quit Smoking? Read This!

## Who Can Help Me?

Your physician should be your first stop. Additional help is often available through community health programs that offer group counseling and smoking cessation programs. Many smokers find group counseling encouraging because they are in an environment where everyone shares the same problems, making it easier to discuss them openly. The American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, American Heart Association, and others offer excellent programs.

## Where Do I Start?

Mark Twain once quipped, "It is easy to quit smoking; I've done it hundreds of times." For a few disciplined people it is easy to quit abruptly or cold turkey; but for many others, it is not easy at all.

Since the prospect of never smoking again may seem unbearable to you, promise to quit for just one week. After you have conquered the first smokeless week, then promise another week, and so on, until you stop for good. You have two major hurdles to overcome: the addiction to nicotine, and the habit of smoking.

## Kicking the Addiction

Tobacco contains nicotine, an addictive drug, and smokers become addicted. If you quit abruptly, you will go through the physical and psychological effects of drug withdrawal. These may include intense food cravings, jittery nerves, anxiety, short temper, depression, and sleeplessness. The addiction/withdrawal symptoms will be worst the first week and less severe during the second. After a month, most of the withdrawal symptoms will be gone. If you quit gradually, the withdrawal may be less intense but more prolonged. This is why many experts recommend quitting abruptly.

## Breaking the Habit

You must break that habit of automatically lighting up and taking a puff before you think of it. So from now on, every time you start to light up, become conscious of the fact that you are doing so. Next, try to think of why you want to smoke. Are you upset about something? Are you in an environment where you usually smoke? Are you nervous? If you can determine exactly when you smoke and why you smoke at that time, you will have better control of these situations.

## Can Nicotine Gum and Patches Help?

Nicotine gum and patches may help you break the habit of smoking and systematically reduce your nicotine addiction. By providing an alternative source of nicotine without the other harmful additives found in tobacco products, they allow you to concentrate on overcoming the psychological and social factors of the smoking habit.

The patches contain nicotine which is slowly released into your bloodstream through the skin; they come in different styles and strengths. Depending on how much you smoke, you may start with a higher dose and reduce to a lower strength.

**Warning:** when you use the patch you cannot keep smoking. If you do, the double amount of nicotine can lead to a very serious condition called nicotine toxicity and cause a heart attack. If you continue to smoke while using the patch, you may end up in the hospital.

Nicotine gum also provides an alternative source of nicotine. Once the habit is broken, you stop chewing the gum and go through drug withdrawal. For some, separating the withdrawal from breaking the habit makes quitting easier.

Although either method can help satisfy your nicotine craving, they are only aids. They are no substitute for willpower and won't work unless you are committed to quitting. The gum or patch should be used in conjunction with a smoking cessation program.

## Tips to Quit

- Tell your friends, family, boss, and fellow workers that you have just quit smoking. You may be temporarily irritable, depressed, and anxious for a week or so, but these withdrawal symptoms will pass. Ask for everyone's support and understanding.
- Do anything to keep busy and keep your mind off smoking. Exercise; work on that talent or hobby you always wanted to develop, especially if it involves use of your hands (sewing, model building, practicing the piano, etc.). Visit your nonsmoking friends, but avoid circumstances you associate with smoking such as cocktail parties, watching television, balancing the checkbook, talking on the telephone, your usual coffee break, etc.
- An excellent time to quit smoking is when you are hospitalized. This controlled environment is very helpful. Physicians often insist that you quit smoking before surgery and anesthesia so you can better resist post-operative pneumonia that smokers are more likely to develop.
- Once you have conquered the addiction, never have a cigarette again - not even just one little puff. Many a successful quitter has stumbled back into a full addiction by having one cigarette to be sociable.
- Instead of having a cigarette, try the following: Keep a pack of chewing gum in the place where your cigarettes would usually be. Drink a glass of water each time the urge to smoke occurs. Start an exercise program to reduce stress and anxiety and burn off those calories you might put on.
- Hide your cigarettes in places where you ordinarily wouldn't look for them.
- Buy cigarettes by the single pack only and not by the carton.
- Avoid sweets and other fattening foods.
- Eat low calorie, healthy ones instead; e.g. chew carrots or celery sticks. Weight gain can be a problem for some smokers who are quitting.

## Did You Know...

- Tobacco related illness, including pipe and spit tobacco, is the most preventable cause of death. In the U.S., 340,000 people die each year from these illnesses.
- Half of the adolescents, whether boys or girls, who start smoking and smoke throughout their lives will be killed by tobacco.
- Tobacco is a health risk to unborn babies of mothers who smoke. It increases the risk of miscarriage, low birth weight, complications during pregnancy, and the likelihood of health problems during infancy and childhood.
- Smoking is the cause of about 30 percent of all cancers and 80 to 90 percent of lung cancer. Lung cancer is the leading cause of death for men and has just surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of death for women.
- Smokers have two times greater risk of dying of heart attacks and three times greater risk of dying of strokes than nonsmokers. Pipe and cigar smokers are three to five times more likely than non-smokers to develop cancer of the mouth and esophagus (swallowing passage).

- Smoking is the major cause of cancer of the larynx (voice box), a cancer that can rob you of your natural voice or lead to death.
- Smokers are more likely to catch pneumonia, colds, bronchitis, and sinus infections more often and have greater difficulty recovering than nonsmokers. Even nonsmokers who work or live with smokers (who cannot avoid breathing their secondhand smoke) suffer this decreased resistance to infections. **This is especially true of children who live in a smoker's household.**

## Authors

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