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Quit Smoking Now! – Causes, Smoking Addiction, Dangers, Ways to Stop and More...

Becoming a Smoker

Smoking is strange behavior. Almost every smoker knows that it's bad for his health, but many smokers continue the habit for decades, each year experiencing a further decline in health and well-being. Looked at rationally, smoking is quite disgusting. It stains the teeth and the fingers, causes bad breath, and creates an unpleasant environment for non-smokers.

It must be pleasurable, though, otherwise nobody would put up with the negative side of smoking. Most smokers admit that they enjoy cigarettes, and those that have managed to quit often feel that they have lost an old friend.

Tobacco is an addictive substance so it's understandable that people find it hard to quit. Less understandable is what motivates people to take their first cigarette. What is behind that decision to start smoking?

Many people start smoking when they are teenagers. The desire to fit in and be one of the 'crowd' is particularly strong during adolescence. Of course, this desire is also present in adults and can be a motivating factor behind much human behaviour. Many teenagers begin smoking because they want to be cool. If their friends smoke there's a lot of subtle (and not-so-subtle) pressure to take up the habit.

Young people may also feel that smoking makes them 'grown up' or it may be a form of rebellion against their parents and teachers. Most young people are already aware of the dangers of smoking so lecturing them about how they are harming their health can be futile.

Appealing advertising is also a big motivator in the desire to take up smoking. Tobacco ads usually depict young healthy active people taking part in fun group activities. The message is clear -- Smoke X brand and you can have this much fun too.

Adults are just as susceptible to popular images surrounding smoking. They are usually self-aware enough to know that smoking will not be the deciding factor behind social acceptance, but there is still the powerful image of the smoker as the rebel -- cool and independent. This can be alluring for some young adults, especially those who see themselves as being on the fringe.

Perhaps certain individuals are more drawn to smoking than others. There is evidence that people with a long-term outlook on life are less likely to start smoking because they know that smoking will shorten their life span and cause future health problems. On the contrary, those with shorter outlooks are more likely to smoke.

Other people turn to smoking because they are looking for a way to relieve stress. Even though tobacco is ineffective for handling stress in the long run, it does provide short-term relief. Those who have stressful jobs or who are in difficult life situations may decide to take up smoking.

Most smokers will come to a point in life where they want to quit. They may face increasing health problems and finally come to the decision to give up the habit. Unfortunately, the addictive nature of tobacco makes this a difficult task.

Smoking Addiction -- Why is it Difficult to Quit?

There is no doubt that smoking is addictive. It doesn't seem to affect everybody the same way though. Some people have great difficulty quitting smoking, while others give it up with almost no effort.

Nicotine is the addictive substance of tobacco. It gets absorbed into the bloodstream where it affects brain chemistry which alters mood and focus. Because of the large surface area of the lungs, smokers receive a big "hit" of nicotine with every puff they take. Since nicotine is absorbed directly into the bloodstream the brain receives an almost instantaneous dose with every puff of a cigarette.

Nicotine primarily affects the mid-brain -- the part of the brain that controls moods and emotions. It produces pleasurable sensations but also causes anxiety and cravings when accustomed doses are withheld. A nicotine substitute such as a patch or chewing gum can help alleviate these negative feelings.

Because of the immediate stimulation to the brain, smoking behaviour is reinforced. When smokers try to quit, they have to overcome both the physical addiction to nicotine and the association they have made between smoking and the pleasurable sensations it produces.

Besides the physical addiction, there are also strong behavioural and social links to smoking. Certain situations (such as the end of a meal or going to a pub) become so associated with smoking that smokers reach for a cigarette without even thinking about it. Smokers may also crave cigarettes during times of stress.

The fact remains, however, that some people become more addicted to nicotine than others. The reason for this may be genetic. It seems that some people metabolize nicotine more slowly than others and this makes them less likely to become addicted to the substance. There is a particular enzyme that is present in the liver which is responsible for breaking down nicotine. People who have a genetic defect related to the production of this enzyme are less likely to smoke, and if they do smoke, they smoke fewer cigarettes than people with the normal enzyme.

There could also be genetic reasons related to behavior that may be linked to smoking addiction. Reaction to stress can be genetically determined, and it seems that stress relief is one of the major reasons that people smoke.

People who are addicted to smoking must take heart in the knowledge that it is possible to quit. Although some find it more difficult than others, there are many resources available to those who wish to give up the habit. If someone needs help to give up nicotine, they can have access to medical treatments and counselling. It is more than just the physical addiction to nicotine that they have to give up. All of the behavioral associations that have been developed over the years also need to be overcome.

As with any other addictive substance, the longer nicotine has been used the more difficult it is to give it up. Young adults who have only been smoking for a few years may find it easier to quit than a middle-aged person who has been smoking for 20 years. On the other hand, a middle-age smoker is more likely to be aware of the negative health effects of smoking and this may give him more motivation to break the habit.

Dangers of Smoking

Almost everybody knows that smoking is bad for the health. Images of blackened lungs line school hallways and hospital waiting rooms, but despite this people continue to take up smoking. This may have to do with the pervasive romantic image of smoking -- an image that has nothing in common with reality.

There are many ways to take tobacco. You can chew it, inhale it through the nose, and smoke it in the form of cigars or cigarettes. No matter how it's taken it is dangerous, but because smoking is the most popular way to consume tobacco it has also received the greatest attention from the medical field and the media.

When a smoker inhales a puff of cigarette smoke the large surface area of the lungs allows nicotine to pass into the blood stream almost immediately. It is this nicotine "hit" that smokers crave, but there is a lot more to smoke than just nicotine. In fact, there are more than 4000 chemical substances that make up cigarette smoke and many of them are toxic.

Cigarette smoke is composed of 43 carcinogenic substances and more than 400 other toxins that can also be found in wood varnish, nail polish remover, and rat poison. All of these substances accumulate in the body and can cause serious problems to the heart and lungs.

Cancer is the most common disease associated with smoking. Smoking is the cause of 90% of lung cancer cases and is related to 30% of all cancer fatalities. Other smoking-related cancers include cancers of the mouth, pancreas, urinary bladder, kidney, stomach, esophagus, and larynx.

Besides cancer, smoking is also related to several other diseases of the lungs. Emphysema and bronchitis can be fatal and 75% of all deaths from these diseases are linked to smoking.

Smokers have shorter lives than non-smokers. On average, smoking takes 15 years off your life span. This can be explained by the high rate of exposure to toxic substances which are found in cigarette smoke.

Smokers also put others at risk. The dangers of breathing in second-hand smoke are well known. Smokers harm their loved ones by exposing them to the smoke they exhale. All sorts of health problems are related to breathing in second-hand smoke. Children are especially susceptible to the dangers of second-hand smoke because their internal organs are still developing. Children exposed to second-hand smoke are more vulnerable to asthma, sudden infant death syndrome, bronchitis, pneumonia, and ear infections.

Smoking can also be dangerous for unborn children. Mothers who smoke are more likely to suffer from miscarriages, bleeding and nausea, and babies of smoking mothers have reduced birth weights or may be premature. These babies are more susceptible to sudden infant death syndrome and may also have lifelong health complications due to chest infections and asthma.

It is never too late to give up smoking, even those who have smoked for 20 years or more can realize tremendous health benefits from giving up the habit.

Nicotine Withdrawal Symptoms

When people try to give up smoking they will experience both psychological and physical withdrawal symptoms. The psychological symptoms are related to the habit of smoking and the things that are normally done while smoking like drinking coffee or talking with friends. Like any bad habit, the smoking habit can be replaced with healthier behaviours, but the physical withdrawal from nicotine may be more difficult to handle.

Nicotine is a powerful drug related to cocaine and morphine. There is evidence that nicotine may be even more addictive than these drugs -- the one-year success rate for heroin withdrawal is more than double that of nicotine withdrawal.

Nicotine affects the neurotransmitters of the brain. The brain becomes accustomed to receiving this kind of stimulation and sends out strong signals of craving when deprived of nicotine. A person trying to quit smoking will experience all kinds of withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, inability to concentrate, insomnia and fatigue. Symptoms are stronger in people who have been smoking longer, and people will often have a greater urge to smoke in places and situations where they are accustomed to smoking.

The symptoms of nicotine withdrawal can be alleviated with nicotine substitutes such as gum or patches. This can help overcome the habit of smoking and it may be easier to cut down on these kinds of secondary nicotine sources than it is by quitting smoking cold turkey. Some types of drugs (particularly antidepressants) can also be used to help lessen the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal.

Nicotine withdrawal symptoms will change over time. They will start as a strong craving for cigarettes. As you continue to deny your body nicotine, you may become irritable and have difficulty concentrating. The brain has become accustomed to working under the influence of this nicotine and may not function up to par when denied this stimulation.

Because the brain is not receiving stimulation from nicotine, you may also feel tired and lack energy. Ironically you may also have difficulty sleeping -- insomnia is a common complaint among people who are trying to quit smoking and will add to your daytime fatigue.

Constipation can also be a problem related to nicotine withdrawal. The digestive system is sensitive to nicotine in the bloodstream. Many smokers are familiar with the sensation of needing to use the bathroom after having a cigarette. The digestive system can become dependent on the stimulation, and when it is removed, the result can be constipation.

Other symptoms related to the mouth, throat, and lungs are also quite common. You may develop a dry mouth and a sore throat and cough, and the tongue and gums may become tender and sore.

Not all people trying to quit smoking experience all of these symptoms, and some may experience certain symptoms more strongly than others. It is important to remember that all the symptoms will pass as long as you refrain from smoking.

The urge to smoke will come in waves, and if you can resist each wave in turn, the urges become less frequent and less severe. Each time that you feel a desire to smoke, try to find some kind of distraction. Doing a bit of exercise when the urge to smoke strikes has two benefits -- your mind is distracted and your health is improved.

Even after you have overcome all of the physical symptoms of nicotine withdrawal, the psychological urge to smoke may remain for months or even years. Cravings may be stronger in situations where you have been accustomed to smoke like parties or pubs. This is due more to behavioural conditioning than actual physical dependence on nicotine.

There will come a day, however, when you will not feel the need to smoke. With time these days will become more frequent until finally the desire to smoke has been completely overcome.

Quitting the Habit – How to Choose the Right Method?

Once you have made the decision to quit smoking, you should choose a method to help you overcome the habit. Each method has advantages and disadvantages, so it's a good idea to examine all of them before deciding.

No matter which method you choose, it is important to have the support and encouragement of family and friends. You can quit smoking on your own but you are more likely to succeed if you have moral support from the people around you.

For most people, the desire to smoke comes in waves. One way to deal with those waves is to pick up the phone and talk to someone who knows that you are trying to quit. This has the dual benefit of offering some distraction as well as getting encouragement in your battle against tobacco.

Ways to Quit

Cold Turkey - If you have a great deal of willpower and a strong desire to quit smoking, you may be able to do it cold turkey. Quitting cold turkey means that you simply stop -- no intermediate steps, just going from your regular habit to no smoking at all.

Certain individuals that metabolize nicotine relatively slowly are more likely to succeed by quitting cold turkey. This is because they are not as physically addicted to nicotine as other smokers are. People with a higher dependence on nicotine may find they need to use a nicotine substitute such as patches or gum.

Slowly Cutting Down - Rather than quitting cold turkey, some people prefer to gradually reduce the number of cigarettes they smoke each day. In order for this to work you need to have a plan to reduce your smoking by a certain amount each day and a goal for the day when you want to be completely smoke-free.

There are many strategies you can use. You could smoke one less cigarette each day; you could delay smoking the first cigarette of the day by a greater amount each day; or you could limit your smoking to a certain number of cigarettes within a three hour period.

Nicotine Substitutes - Either of the above methods could be supplemented with the use of a nicotine substitute like gum, spray or patches. This helps reduce the craving for nicotine which is behind the desire to smoke. The brain has become accustomed to regular doses of nicotine so by supplying the nicotine by other means quitting the habit becomes easier.

Before using a nicotine substitute consult with your doctor concerning any health risks that may be associated with it. Nicotine substitutes are available in the form of chewing gum, nasal spray, lozenges, inhalators, or tablets that are kept under the tongue. Patches can also be worn on the skin to provide a constant supply of nicotine to the bloodstream throughout the day.

Zyban - Zyban is an antidepressant drug that has been proven effective reducing nicotine withdrawal symptoms. It is available by doctor's prescription.

Hypnosis - Hypnosis has also been used to help overcome nicotine cravings. It seems to be most effective in those who have a strong desire to quit.

Acupuncture - As with hypnosis, acupuncture works best with people who are committed to quitting smoking. Both acupuncture and hypnosis may work by reinforcing the commitment to giving up smoking. There is no evidence that they are any more effective than other methods.

How to Cope with Lapses

During the quitting process the urge to smoke will be very strong. At some point, many people succumb to those urges. In fact, most people will have lapses or relapses on the road to smoke-free lives. Rather than viewing these lapses as failures, it is better to view them as learning opportunities to understand why we slipped and how we can prevent it from happening again.

Lapses can happen any time. It could happen days or months after making the decision to quit. They are often triggered by stressful situations or by placing yourself in a situation which you associate with smoking. You may say to yourself, "Oh, it's just a few puffs", or "Just this one time." That "one time" could lead into a full-blown relapse.

All is not lost, however. Nearly every former smoker went through similar episodes as they tried to quit the habit. Each time you again resolve to give up smoking you are approaching the task with greater determination and knowledge about what lies ahead.

Dealing with Lapses

If you find yourself smoking again, simply stop! Some people pick up a cigarette without even thinking about it. Even if you are in the middle of a puff, put the cigarette out and throw it away. If you have bought a pack of cigarettes, don't even think about finishing it. Put them in the garbage. If you are smoking because you are sitting with other smokers, excuse yourself and leave.

Go for a walk and get some fresh air. Let your mind clear and use the opportunity to assess what made you pick up a cigarette. Remind yourself of all the reasons why you have decided to quit smoking and re-establish their importance in your mind.

Try to talk to a friend or family member who can offer moral support in your effort to quit smoking. Be upfront about your lapse and ask for their opinion on how to prevent it from happening again. Above all, do not let yourself get down. View the lapse as an opportunity to plan strategies for similar situations.

It is important to critically examine the situation which caused the lapse. Who were you

with? What were you doing? How did that cigarette make you feel? The answers can help you reassess your desire to quit smoking and strengthen your resolve to overcome the desire to smoke in similar situations.

Getting Back on Track

To overcome the lapse or relapse, you must renew your vow to quit smoking. Think of all the reasons that made you come to that decision in the first place -- they are just as valid after a relapse as before, perhaps even more so. Recognize the progress you have made so far. After all, you may have gone several days or even months without having a cigarette. That is no mean feat.

If your lapse has been for several days, you may need a nicotine substitute like gum or a patch to tide you over. Don't hesitate to talk to your doctor or counsellor about what has happened and ask for their advice.

Above all, don't dwell on this temporary failure. Recognize it as one step along the path to a smoke-free future.

Natural Ways to Stop Smoking

There are many paths to a smoke-free living. You can use aids like patches, gum, or drugs like Zyban to help get over the physical addiction to nicotine. You may decide to quit cold turkey and suffer the withdrawal symptoms, or you may gradually cut down on your cigarette habit.

As an alternative to nicotine substitutes, you can treat the challenge of quitting the habit as an opportunity to make changes in your lifestyle for the better. At the end of the process you will not only be a smoke-free, you will have also gained new eating habits and lifestyle changes for healthier living.

Making changes to your lifestyle and eating habits is a big challenge, and requires a certain level of dedication. You will find, however, that eating healthier and living healthier also makes it easier to quit smoking. You will also develop strategies for dealing with nicotine withdrawal.

Since we are talking about several changes to your style of living, it's a good idea to take at least a week or two off your regular routine to make the changes. If you can take some time off work and get away from your regular schedule you will be exposed to fewer situations which you associate with smoking. You can also take the time to recover from the effects of nicotine withdrawal.

A regular exercise routine is an essential part of healthy living. If you have not exercised previously, build up to it gradually. Rather than starting on an ambitious two-mile jog every morning, begin by going for long walks. As your stamina increases and your

health improves you can add more vigorous activities to your exercise routine.

Healthy eating is also very important for regaining the health that may have been lost from your smoking habit. Eat plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits and cut down on fatty meats and foods high in saturated fats like fast food and desserts. Eating good-quality food can help eliminate toxins from the body faster which makes it easier to overcome your nicotine habit.

You are likely to experience symptoms from nicotine withdrawal. Nicotine is a powerful drug that affects many parts of the body but particularly the brain. Smokers become accustomed to the regular stimulation that nicotine provides, and may feel sluggish and inattentive when it is deprived. Rather than depending on nicotine substitutes to overcome the symptoms, simply take short naps whenever you feel drained.

Another symptom of nicotine withdrawal is irritability. Whenever you feel this way or are craving a cigarette, go for a brisk walk. This helps clear your mind and overcome the desire for nicotine.

You may also find that your mouth and throat feel dry or that you develop a cough or postnasal drip. This is caused by the body ridding itself of excess mucus produced because of exposure to smoke. To overcome these symptoms drink plenty of juice and water or suck on lozenges.

Cutting down on caffeine should be part of your new healthy lifestyle. There is no need to eliminate caffeine completely, but it is particularly important to avoid it after six pm. Nicotine withdrawal can cause insomnia and you do not want exasperate that by stimulating yourself with too much caffeine.

It is important to find natural ways to relax. Many people are tempted to smoke when exposed to stressful situations. It is far healthier to learn relaxation techniques like deep breathing. Nicotine withdrawal may also cause headaches which can be relieved by hot baths or gentle body movements like rolling the head.

All of these techniques are extremely helpful in overcoming the cigarette habit but they are also useful for maintaining good health. Make them part of your regular lifestyle and you will feel better, look better, and have a healthier outlook on life.

Zyban

One of the therapies for quitting smoking is the use of a drug called Zyban. The generic name of Zyban is bupropion hydrochloride and also goes under the names Wellbutrin or Wellbutrin SR. Originally used as an antidepressant, it was observed that people taking the drug lost interest in cigarettes and gave up the habit quite easily. It has been available as a smoking treatment since 1998.

The reason Zyban is effective is not clearly understood. It seems to affect brain

chemistry which makes patients feel energized and gives them a sense of well-being. It is equally useful for helping depressed and non-depressed patients quit smoking.

Patients start taking Zyban while they are still smoking. The quit date is set for 7 days later, and the drug is continued for another 7 to 10 weeks after that. Patients report that symptoms of nicotine withdrawal are minimized. Studies have shown that success rates of Zyban are about twice that of placebos.

Although the manufacturer reports that Zyban can be used safely for long periods of time, if the smoker hasn't made significant changes in his smoking habits by the end of 10 weeks it is unlikely that continued use of Zyban will be helpful. Zyban treatment is like any other method for quitting smoking -- in order to be effective the desire to quit has to come from within. Those who really don't want to stop smoking will find ways to sabotage any quitting plan.

People taking Zyban may suffer from a few side effects. The most commonly reported ones are insomnia and a dry mouth. Those with a history of seizures, eating disorders, and cirrhosis of the liver are advised not to take the drug.

Compared with Patches

Zyban is one way to overcome nicotine withdrawal, but there are other methods available. One of the most popular is the nicotine patch -- a square patch that sticks to the skin and releases small doses of nicotine throughout the day. Patches allow the body to get the nicotine it craves without suffering the ill effects of smoking.

Zyban works a little bit differently than nicotine substitutes because it is not providing nicotine to the body. Rather, the feeling of well-being it provides, allows the smoker to give up the habit with relatively little difficulty and is equally effective for behavioural modification as it is for physical dependency on nicotine.

People using patches, on the other hand, may still feel the desire to smoke in certain situations because of ingrained associations with smoking. For example, some people associate smoking with going to the pub -- this is simply a habit which must be overcome.

Patches can help eliminate the cravings associated with smoking, but they have to be used with a little bit of care. They can be worn throughout the day, but should be removed at night. Otherwise, they may cause insomnia or strange dreams.

The skin where the patch is applied may become red and itchy. These symptoms usually disappear within an hour after the patch is removed but can cause discomfort during the day.

Patches (as well as other nicotine substitutes like gum) are available in various strengths and so can be used to gradually wean the body from its nicotine dependence. Those with a strong desire to quit smoking may find that nicotine substitutes allow them to concentrate on the behavioural changes needed to rid themselves of dependency on tobacco.

Zyban is also effective for overcoming nicotine dependence. Once treatment stops, however, the desire to smoke in certain situations may still be present.

Both Zyban and nicotine substitutes are more effective when used in conjunction with some kind of counselling or therapy. A smoker should also enlist the help of family and friends to overcome his habit.

Nicotine Gum

Nicotine is the addictive substance of tobacco, and smokers become accustomed to the stimulation that nicotine provides. When smokers try to quit, the cravings that they feel are mostly due to nicotine withdrawal. A Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) can help overcome these cravings for nicotine.

Some of the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal include irritability, inability to concentrate, drowsiness, insomnia, and dry cough. An NRT like nicotine gum reduces these symptoms and allows the user to gradually cut down on the amount of nicotine his system needs to function normally. At the same time, his exposure to all of the other toxic substances in cigarette smoke is eliminated.

Of the many NRTs available, one of the most popular and easy to use is nicotine gum. Unlike patches, nicotine gum allows the user to control when and how much nicotine goes into his system. As an added benefit, it provides an oral replacement for those who need to overcome the habit of having a cigarette in their mouth.

Nicotine gum is available in different strengths. Heavy smokers are advised to start off with gum which has a relatively high amount of nicotine -- 4 mg. As dependence on nicotine is reduced, the strength of the gum can also be reduced to 2 mg. Most manufacturers offer gum in these two strengths.

The gum can be taken at certain intervals during the day to maintain a constant level of nicotine in the bloodstream, or it can be taken only when there is a craving for cigarettes. The gum is usually taken at regular intervals at the beginning of the therapy and then gradually reduced over a period of weeks.

It is advisable to consult with your doctor or pharmacist before using nicotine gum. They can offer guidelines about how to use the gum and the length of time the therapy should continue. Using nicotine gum in combination with certain medications may be contraindicated, so it is especially important to consult with your doctor if you are on any other kind of drug therapy.

Nicotine gum is used differently from regular gum. It should not be chewed continuously, but rather only until you feel a slight tingling in your mouth. When this

happens, stop chewing and put the gum between your teeth and your cheek for about one minute until the tingling stops, and then again resume chewing slowly. Repeat this cycle for about 30 minutes or until there is no more taste left in the gum.

Gradually reduce the amount of gum you are using over a period of about three months. By this time, you should be taking no more than two or three pieces of nicotine gum a day. Do not continue using the gum for longer than three months.

Most people can use nicotine gum without experiencing any side effects, but adverse reactions sometimes occur. It is possible that the gum may bring on headaches, dizziness, upset stomach, and soreness in the mouth. If these conditions persist consult with your doctor. More severe side effects include seizures and difficulty breathing. If this happens, it is important to seek immediate medical attention.

Thousands of people have found NRT to be an effective aid to quitting smoking. The nicotine replacement method you decide on is a personal preference, but chewing gum has the advantage of being easy to use and providing doses of nicotine when it is most needed.

Manufacturers of nicotine gum include Nicorette and Rite Aid.

Nicotine Patch

Smokers find it hard to quit the habit because they are addicted to nicotine. They may also be accustomed to the habit of smoking in certain situations, but it is the nicotine which causes cravings for cigarettes. A popular method for quitting smoking is to get nicotine from sources other than tobacco. These Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRTs) include the use of nicotine gum or nicotine patches.

Both of these products release nicotine into the bloodstream. This helps to reduce the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal which include irritability, fatigue, headaches, insomnia, and the inability to concentrate. They also help control the urge to smoke cigarettes.

A nicotine patch is applied to the skin where it releases a steady stream of nicotine into the bloodstream throughout the day. This is different from nicotine gum which provides doses of nicotine only when chewed. Nicotine patches are slightly more convenient than gum, but do not provide the oral distraction that some smokers need when overcoming the smoking habit.

Patches are available in three different strengths. Heavy smokers are advised to start with the 21 mg patches, but moderate smokers could start with 14 mg patches. These beginning strength patches are used for about six weeks and then replaced with lower-strength patches for another two weeks. Heavy smokers can finish off with the 7 mg patches for an additional two weeks.

Some patches are designed to be worn for 24 hours a day, while others are only to be

worn for 16 hours a day. Some people find they do not sleep well when a patch is applied to their skin, or they may experience unsettling vivid dreams. If this happens you would be advised to try the 16 hour patch.

As with any NRT therapy, it is important to stop smoking before beginning to use nicotine patches. They should be applied to an area of skin which has relatively little hair and is free from scratches or abrasions. Most people apply the patch to their upper arms, backs or thighs. To prevent skin irritation patches must be applied to a new area of skin every day, and each area should not be used more than once per week.

If the patch falls off during the day, for example when bathing or swimming, it can be replaced. Used patches must be discarded so that they cannot be retrieved by animals or children.

Some people experience mild skin irritation and itching when using nicotine patches. The skin may also turn red and become uncomfortable. If the irritation is severe and cannot be relieved by simple washing with soap and water, contact your doctor to discuss the situation. Perhaps the patch you are using is too strong, or perhaps a patch from a different manufacturer may alleviate your symptoms. It is also possible that you may have to switch to another type of NRT such as nicotine gum or nasal spray.

Nicotine replacement therapies have a relatively high rate of success. It must be remembered, however, that addiction to nicotine is only part of the smoking habit. Another big part of it is the associations made between smoking and particular situations. Many former smokers still feel the urge to light up when they are in a pub or at a party, and it is these behavioural associations to tobacco that are behind many lapses. It is important to replace the smoking habit with other healthier habits.

Popular brand names of nicotine patches include Habitrol, NicoDerm CQ, and Nicotrol.

How to Stay Quit

We have all met people who claim that 'quitting smoking is easy.' They usually say this as they are puffing on a cigarette. Sure -- it's easy to quit for an hour or a day, but it's the staying quit part which is difficult.

Perhaps one of the best motivators for staying away from cigarettes is knowing how it benefits you. According to the US Surgeon General's report the benefits of quitting smoking start almost immediately and accumulate the longer you refrain from smoking. After just 20 minutes of non-smoking your blood pressure returns to normal. Eight hours later, the carbon dioxide has been eliminated from your system. During the three months after quitting, your lung capacity increases by 30%. One year after quitting your risk of heart attack has become half that of a regular smoker. After five years your risk of stroke has normalized and after 10 years your risk of lung cancer is half that of a regular smoker.

These accumulated health benefits are the same no matter when you quit. Of course, if you quit when you are young you have a much better chance of regaining normal health within a shorter time. But even if you quit when you are 60 your life expectancy and quality of living will increase.

Unfortunately, what is going to happen 10 years down the road is often of little consequence during a spell of nicotine craving. The longer you quit smoking, however, the less often these cravings will occur. But smoking is more than just a physical addiction, it is also a behavioral habit, and long after the physical need for nicotine has been overcome you may still feel the urge to smoke in certain situations.

Identifying the situations which cause you to reach for a cigarette can be of great help in overcoming the urge to smoke. If you know, for example, that you feel like smoking at parties, you may want to avoid them for a certain period of time until you break the habit. Likewise, if situations of stress make you want to smoke, finding alternate ways to deal with stress will help you stay smoke-free.

Despite all your best efforts, you may find that you have lapsed and have taken up smoking again. If this happens, don't be discouraged -- many people have to try four or five times before they successfully quit. The most important thing is to immediately stop smoking. Even if you are in the middle of a cigarette, put it out and throw away the rest of the package. Don't get down on yourself or think that you have failed -- each time you renew your resolution to quit it becomes stronger.

Try to find moral support from family and friends. If you feel like smoking, talk to somebody about it and let them know what you are going through. Some communities have support groups for people who are trying to quit. With regular meetings and contact with other members you can support each other and offer encouragement and advice.

Some companies also offer programs for employees who wish to quit. Take advantage of all of these services -- your commitment to quit smoking is beneficial not only to yourself but also to your family, friends, and associates.

Avoid Weight Gain When Quitting Smoking

Many people believe that it is inevitable to gain weight when you quit smoking, but this is not necessarily true. There are several things to do to prevent weight gain, and even if you do gain five or 10 pounds, it can easily be taken off again once you have kicked the smoking habit.

There are several reasons why we have a tendency to gain weight when we try to quit smoking. Nicotine acts as a stimulant and appetite suppressor, so one of the effects of quitting smoking can be an increased appetite. There are other factors involved as well. Smokers have a tendency to skip meals. They may also eat quickly so they can light up a cigarette afterwards. After quitting smoking, skipped meals become less frequent and

unless you eat slower you may end up eating more.

Some people may crave an oral substitute for cigarettes and use food to keep their mouth busy. This in itself would not be so bad if healthy low-calorie foods are chosen, but usually cigarettes are replaced by sweets and candies. Finally, certain situations which are associated with smoking (like parties) may cause you to compensate by eating more food.

It is important to remember that quitting smoking is a difficult undertaking in itself. Some people may be tempted to reform all their bad habits at once but this can lead to failure in all their attempts. Focus on the task of quitting smoking and don't worry too much if you are gaining a few extra pounds. Eating healthy food and avoiding sweets will help to minimize the weight gain.

If you skipped meals when you were smoking, you will probably find your appetite has increased after quitting. Many smokers get by with a coffee and a cigarette in the morning rather than eating a full breakfast. If you find you want to eat a regular breakfast after quitting smoking, make it a healthy one of fruits, eggs, and cereal. This is good for your overall health and will allow you to start your day on the right step.

If you developed the habit of eating quickly so that you could finish your meal with a cigarette, you will probably find that you finish your meals before everyone else. This may tempt you to take second helpings. Try to lengthen the time of your meal by chewing more slowly, cutting your food into smaller pieces, or pausing between mouthfuls.

If you had the habit of smoking while watching TV, substitute cigarettes with healthy tidbits like celery sticks, carrots, broccoli or tomatoes. Using sweets or candies as a cigarette substitute is a sure way to gain excess pounds.

It's a good idea to keep plenty of healthy snacks on hand to help you combat the smoking urge. Things to keep stored on your cupboard or refrigerator include yogurt, herbal teas, fresh fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Keep all of the high calorie snacks out of sight at the back of the cupboard or refrigerator so you are less tempted when looking for a cigarette substitute.

Getting plenty of exercise is always a good idea. As we mentioned above though, making too many changes to your routine at the same time may cause all of them to fail. It may be better to wait a few months before instituting a new exercise routine. Exercise will make you feel better, reinforce your commitment to stay smoke free, and shed those few extra pounds you may have gained.

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