

# Getting through the early days

## SET YOURSELF GOALS THAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE

For many smokers the idea of never smoking again is a bit frightening (if you aren't sure how hard it will be, try one of the exercises in the Understanding Your Smoking Advice Sheet). If you are still attached to smoking, then you should consider setting yourself short-term goals. Some smokers even like to take it a cigarette at a time (see the Strategies for Stopping Advice Sheet). The most common short-term goal is to take it a day at a time (you can choose any length of time that suits you). It is easier to make an absolute commitment to yourself to not smoke for one day than it is to say forever! Each day you need to recommit. It is important that you do this when you are not craving a cigarette (see below).

As you achieve each short-term goal, you should also remind yourself that you have succeeded, so can do the same again. You will find after a few days or weeks, at the longest, it starts to get easier. When this happens, you can think about increasing the length of each goal (e.g., from a day to a week, then to a month), and eventually, it will get to a point where deciding never to smoke again no longer feels threatening, and then you can make the final commitment.

## MAKE A RULE: "WHAT I WILL DO IF I WANT TO REVIEW MY DECISION TO QUIT"

This might sound like thinking about giving up before you have started, but it is not. Most quit attempts end with a person going back to smoking. A common reason is that the decision to resume smoking is made when craving a cigarette. We recommend you use the following two step rule:

- a. Only consider giving up on your quit attempt when you are not craving a cigarette and when you have your list of reasons for quitting in front of you. If you decide you can't continue with this quit attempt, then;
- b. Delay returning to smoking until the next morning or the end of any short term goal you have set. Finally, review your decision again to be sure you are prepared to give up all that you have gained so far.

Many people find it easier to follow through on a commitment like this than promising never to smoke again, ever.

## PLAN FOR HIGH RISK SITUATIONS

Every quitter has his or her own set of potential high-risk situations; situations in which they used to smoke and are likely to experience strong cravings after they quit.

Ask yourself:

- Are there any situations where I expect to get, or am still getting, strong cravings to smoke?
- Are there any situations where I feel uncomfortable without cigarettes?
- Am I avoiding any situations because I think it would be too hard to resist smoking?

For each of the situations you identify, you need to work out a plan for what you will do when you face this situation. You should work out your plans by creating instructions for yourself in the form: “When tempting situation <insert the situation you are facing or about to face> occurs, I will do <insert what you have decided to do.>”

Stating the situation first can help you be prompted for what to do when that situation actually occurs. When the situation occurs, think to yourself “Now I am about to be in this situation”, and your planned response is likely to spring to mind.

Note: The best strategies for coping are ones that stop the temptations occurring in the first place, or which make them weaker. However, you also need to be prepared to have strategies to resist temptations when they occur. Sometimes this will be the only thing you can do, at other times it will be the emergency strategy if all else fails. There are some suggestions in the material below to help you develop your plans.

## AVOID TEMPTATIONS WHERE YOU CAN

For the first few days, if you can, avoid situations where you think that you’ll be the most tempted to smoke. Try and take some of the stress out of your

life, and avoid socialising with friends when they are smoking. If you drink, avoid it for the first few days at least. When you start again, begin by drinking with nonsmoking friends in a place where you can’t smoke and there are no cigarettes about. When you feel confident enough, it is important to deliberately seek out situations you have avoided to face the challenge of enjoying them and surviving without smoking.

## REJECT THOUGHTS ABOUT THE DESIRABILITY OF SMOKING

If a thought about the desirability of smoking keeps popping into your mind: note it and then tell yourself “STOP, I have heard that” and then turn your mind to something else.

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Practicing not smoking in some situations where you normally smoke is a useful thing to do before you quit. Once you have quit, treat each situation you successfully negotiate as practice for next time. Remember, each time you successfully resist temptations to smoke, you are helping develop the new healthy habit of not smoking in that situation.

Focus on enjoying situations without smoking, so that in time you are not just surviving in them, but actually look forward to them as much or more than you did as a smoker. This takes time and practice. You will quickly get practice with situations you can’t avoid, such as not smoking after meals. Other situations, such as being at the pub with friends who smoke, can be confronted later, when you feel ready.

## HAVE AN EMERGENCY PLAN

You need a fall-back strategy for when you get unexpected cravings to smoke or when your first-line strategy does not work. If you find yourself in such a situation, some possible emergency strategies are:

- Just keep repeating to yourself “I will not give in. I can resist anything my addiction throws at me”.
- Think about your reasons for quitting: Keep a list in your wallet or handbag (perhaps with pictures, e.g. of your family).
- Focus your mind on the things you don’t like about smoking; this can be the smell of second-hand smoke, the whiff from an ashtray, or of the diseases it causes.
- Do something else, like fiddle with your mobile phone.
- If all else fails, get out of there! You don’t have to leave altogether; you can just leave for a minute or two to clear your head (the toilet is one good excuse). After you leave, take a few deep breaths and remind yourself that your desire to be a nonsmoker is stronger than your desire to smoke. This is a battle that you are already winning. Then, you can return and enjoy another small victory over your addiction.

Whatever you do, avoid reviewing your reasons for quitting: you have already made the decision, and it is the right one.

## PREPARE YOURSELF EACH DAY

Each morning, start out by reviewing your plan for the day and making sure you are prepared for the situations you expect to face. Make sure you have a catch-all strategy for unexpected cravings. It can also be useful to review how things went each day and where you had problems, think if there are better ways to deal with those situations.

## KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR CAFFEINE INTAKE

Nicotine speeds up metabolism of caffeine. This means that after you quit if you maintain your usual caffeine intake it is easy to get too much. This can make you feel racy and jittery. You need to reduce the amount of coffee, tea, cola or other caffeine-containing drinks you have. Replace at least some of them with decaf, fruit juice or water. If you do feel jumpy and unable to concentrate in the days after you quit, try cutting out caffeine altogether for a while. It may be the culprit, not the lack of nicotine

## REWARD YOURSELF

Reward yourself for your successes. For example, you could gather up all the money you didn’t spend on cigarettes in the first week to spend on something you value. If you reward yourself, make it something you will really enjoy, and be sure to keep reminding yourself of how you came to get the reward. If you decide to save the money, keep a note of how much you are saving and reward yourself by thinking about that. Remind yourself that each day you stay quit is a victory for you over your addiction, and take pride in the extra control you have over your life. More information on how to reward yourself for your success can be found in the Rewards of Quitting Advice Sheet.

## COMMON CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

In this section we explore some common challenging situations and suggest some strategies for coping. These are only suggestions. If you have better ideas, you should use them.



## A SENSE OF LOSS OR GRIEF

In the first few weeks quitters often experience some emotional ups and downs associated with the physical adjustment to being without nicotine, and the experience of change. It is common at this stage for quitters to have a vague sense of missing something, or a sense of loss or grief, even if they are absolutely determined to become a nonsmoker. This is a normal reaction (see the Special Resource Light at the End of the Tunnel). As with other experiences of change or grief, it can help to focus on taking things one day at a time and to indulge yourself with extra self-care – good food and some extra rest. One potential trap at this point is to find yourself feeling sentimental about your past life as a smoker. It's important to remember that while to some extent cigarettes may have felt like a companion or friend, this addictive 'friend' was robbing you blind and destroying your health.

## FINDING REPLACEMENTS

You have organized much of your life around smoking, both around the actions involved and around the changing patterns of nicotine in your blood. Learning how to get focus in your life without smoking can take time, and may require actively creating new ways of organizing your life.

There are many things you can do to replace cigarettes. For example, drink lots of water or non-caffeinated drinks, eat low-fat and low-sugar foods, and practise relaxation techniques such as deep breathing. In addition to these simple things, try to work out other ways to replace the benefits that smoking appeared to offer.

Not knowing what to do with your hands is a normal experience after quitting. After all, having a cigarette in your hand was almost like an extension of yourself.

The solution is simple – find other things to do with your hands. For example, you may want to doodle with a pen, squeeze a stressball, jingle your keys or replace your cigarette with your phone in your hands. You can also hold pieces of food such as cigarette sized bits of carrot or celery or a drink of water. By occupying your hands in these sorts of ways you'll soon find that the problem resolves itself.

Sometimes a sense of loss can be made worse if you avoid enjoyable activities you previously associated with smoking, like unwinding after work or relaxing after dinner. It can make a big difference to begin experimenting with ways of doing these things without smoking, perhaps by finding substitute activities. Nothing will be a perfect substitute to begin with, and any option will feel slightly strange, because you are creating a new habit. The good news is that we can develop habits very quickly, even good ones! For more ideas see the Rewards of Quitting Advice Sheet in the Additional Resources section of this site.

## TAKING BREAKS

You need to take breaks, and if you associate these with smoking, it is important to change those associations.

It is common to feel uncomfortable during breaks in the days after you quit. Without smoking you don't seem to have anything to do, so it can help to find some routines that suit you. What these are can vary enormously – you need to choose things that work for you. Some things that you might consider are enjoying a drink or a snack; walking with friends rather than standing or sitting; finding a new shared interest, discussing the latest news, or chatting about a sporting event; or doing something by yourself; e.g., texting friends, listening to some music.

For the early days, try to find places to take breaks where you won't feel so tempted. If you socialise with smokers during breaks, try to have a break with other nonsmokers, preferably in an area where smoking is not allowed. Once you feel confident about resisting urges to smoke, you can resume your old patterns if you want to. When you feel ready to join smokers without being too tempted, take an alternative to a cigarette along such as some fruit or a drink, but be sure not to take something you previously associated with smoking. You may also want to tell your friends to not offer you a cigarette, no matter what!

## BEING LESS ABLE TO CONCENTRATE AND WORK EFFECTIVELY

It is important to organize your activities in ways that support your quit attempt. Set smaller, shorter-term goals than you usually would by breaking your tasks into smaller parts. If at any stage you are still struggling, then do something else for a short while which doesn't require much concentration. Make sure you continue to take work breaks. Find other things to do at times when you would have had a smoking break (e.g., walking, having a drink of water, doing some deep breathing exercises, or chatting with someone). If you are still finding it difficult, consider taking more frequent shorter breaks. You may want to increase your energy quickly by taking a brief, brisk walk, or you could go outside and take some long, deep breaths to clear your head.

The longer you stay quit, the more energy you will have. Be careful not to waste it all on extra work, but also take time to enjoy yourself. Trying to do too much is one of the worst things you can do for your concentration.

## COPING WHEN YOU FEEL STRESSED

As smoking is now banned in most indoor public places, you need to have effective ways of coping with stress that don't involve smoking, regardless of whether you quit.

It is common to feel more stressed than usual in the days and weeks after you quit. If you don't have strategies planned for when a problem arises, you can end up panicking and see no option but to smoke. It is important that you have worked out what to do as an alternative when you feel stressed. An important stress management technique is to mentally distance yourself from the source of the stress.

You can do this purely by thinking about something else, but it can be easier to do this if you physically get away from the situation as well. Go to where there are fewer reminders of the problem. Going for a walk, doing some exercises and taking some deep breaths can help you to calm down so you can think more calmly about the problem.

If it is difficult to leave a situation, it may be possible to escape for a short time by getting a drink (water is preferable to tea or coffee), or excusing yourself to go to the toilet. Take this opportunity to have a few deep breaths and perhaps stretch a few muscles. If you really can't leave the situation and you have no real control, sip on some water (if there is any), stretch your legs, fiddle with some worry beads or other objects, or try doing some other simple task to take your mind off it. See the Dealing with Stress resource for more suggestions.

How you think about it also makes a difference. Tell yourself things like 'I've learnt to cope with other situations and I can handle this one'; 'Crises happen regularly, if I use them as an excuse I'll never stay quit'; or 'Even if I have a cigarette, I'll still have to deal with this situation'. What is certain is that smoking never really made managing stressful situations any easier. In fact, by distracting you with the need to smoke, it probably made it harder to work out real solutions to your problems.

### FEELING LESS ABLE TO ENJOY SOCIAL SITUATIONS AND GOOD TIMES

We know that you may think you will enjoy some occasions less if you can't smoke. You may want to spend some time challenging the validity of this belief. That is, did smoking really make the situation better? Are you really missing out on anything by not smoking? Also, did you really enjoy every cigarette in those situations or is it just the memory of a few? Try to remember how horrible you often felt after a night smoking lots of cigarettes and how your clothes and body reeked.

It may be that you feel uncomfortable in social situations without smoking. Social situations can be tricky after you've quit, especially if smoking was an important part of being in them. However, as you develop new habits, this problem will disappear. To start with you need to plan out alternatives and focus on enjoying these situations without smoking. Remind yourself that smoking in these situations is now just a memory and you are going to replace that memory with new ways of thinking and being. Treat it as a challenge and look forward to conquering it.

You may wish to rehearse scenes in your mind before entering these situations. For example, visualise yourself in a social situation coping with other smokers around and enjoying yourself without cigarettes. Also, practise what you are going to say if someone offers you a cigarette. You may want to tell your smoking friends beforehand not to give you a cigarette under any circumstances, even if you beg for one. You may want to choose someone you trust to be a watch-dog for you so you won't slip up. Keep reminding yourself of all the benefits you are gaining and will continue to gain from quitting, and that just having one or two cigarettes will blow all the good work you've already done.



## TIPS FOR STAYING QUIT

### Be prepared

- Regularly review your strategies for coping with temptations.
- Remember that what you think about cravings affects their frequency, so try to focus on the positives of quitting and being a nonsmoker.

### If you are feeling uncomfortable and think a cigarette might help

- Ask yourself, 'What is going on in my life? Why am I feeling more vulnerable at the moment?' If you can, do something about the underlying issue.

### If you get an unexpected craving to smoke

- Use your emergency plan.

### At any time when you are having trouble resisting a cigarette

- Remind yourself of your reasons for quitting.
- Use the thought-stopping exercise: If you find you get 'hooked' into a certain thought or idea that continually makes you feel stressed, e.g. a craving, you can very sternly say the word 'STOP' to yourself and force your mind onto something more positive.
- Remind yourself of what has already worked against cravings.
- Remember the 4Ds:
  - Delay
  - Deep breathe
  - Drink water
  - Do something else
- Remember not to make any decision on the spur-of-the-moment, especially when you are craving a cigarette - implement your plan for reviewing your decision if you think you might give in.

### If all else fails

- If you have a friend you can call in an emergency: Call them!
- Call the Quitline 13 7848 and discuss your options.

For more advice on learning to be a nonsmoker in the long-term, click on the Becoming a Nonsmoker Advice Sheet in the Additional Resources section.