

Understanding your smoking

The more you understand about your smoking, the more you will understand the challenge you are facing. You will then be better placed to develop a new smokefree lifestyle.

The two key things to realise are:

- how and when you will be most tempted to smoke and
- the extent to which smoking is tied up with your lifestyle.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT TEMPTS YOU TO SMOKE

You can improve your understanding of what leads you to smoke by a combination of thinking about past experiences and carefully exploring when and why you smoke.

REFLECTING ON PAST EXPERIENCES

Make a list of situations in which you have had difficulty coping when you weren't able to smoke (or you haven't been able to resist smoking). Now make a separate list of situations in which not smoking hasn't been as much of a problem. Write down what you were doing in each situation, whether other people were around and whether any of them were smoking, how you were feeling, and anything else that seems relevant. Now, compare the two lists. What are the main differences? If similar situations appear on both lists, the differences may be important. Does how you feel make a difference? Try thinking of plans to deal with the difficult situations, where possible use your experiences with situations that aren't so hard.

EXPLORING YOUR SMOKING PATTERNS

Think about your smoking patterns. Try and work out whether you are smoking in response to particular situations, particular activities or particular emotions (e.g., when tired, bored, stressed, relaxed, happy, or all of the above). You may find it helpful to complete a Smoking Diary for a day or two. If your smoking differs on weekends from during the week, complete the diary on at least one weekday and one weekend day. If you are cutting down or have already quit, use the Cravings and Smoking Diary instead. Copies of both diaries are at the end of this document, or you can find them in the Additional Resources section on the QuitCoach website.

The idea is to jot down what times you smoke (or get cravings), what you are doing at the time, what emotions you notice at the time, if any, and then how much you wanted each cigarette. The diary can give you a lot of information to help you plan how to deal with temptations to smoke. Most people notice patterns to their smoking, and realise that strategies that are effective in one situation may transfer to other similar situations.

Pay close attention to the situations where you felt you particularly wanted a cigarette. Was your desire to smoke related to the situation itself, or was it more related to a craving for nicotine? If you are not sure, choose several situations in which you expect to have difficulty not smoking, decide not to smoke in each of them on at least one occasion, and observe how you feel.

If you get such a strong temptation that you give in and smoke, you have learnt that you are going to need to re-learn how to deal with that situation without smoking. The situations in which you succeed in not smoking are those that you should have less trouble with after you quit.

UNDERSTANDING HOW WEDDED YOU ARE TO SMOKING

How do you get to the point of no longer wanting to smoke? Most people don't know. When do you get to the point of enjoying the benefits of not smoking? Most smokers have to quit while a part of them still wants to keep on smoking. The more attached to smoking you feel, the more likely it is that you will find it easier to adopt short-term, intermediate goals for quitting, like taking it a day at a time. See the Advice Sheet Getting through the Early Days.

For some smokers, one of the most difficult things about quitting is coming to accept that they will never smoke again. This is likely to be the case if you get pleasure from smoking or find it a source of comfort. Those who smoke as a way of coping with stress or because they are addicted are less likely to miss smoking. Many smokers tell us that their cigarettes are a bit like a friend - something reassuring to have around. Often smokers fear being without cigarettes and don't want to lose the things they value about smoking. This keeps them smoking for long after they have realised that they would be better off if they quit.

Saying goodbye to smoking is a little like a divorce or leaving your childhood activities behind. It represents starting a new stage of your life. This can be a little scary. As with any major life change, it will be easier if you embrace your new life rather than focus on what you are losing. This involves accepting and saying goodbye to the things you enjoyed about smoking or that were important to you. The writer Richard Klein wrote a book called "Cigarettes are sublime" about his love affair with smoking because this was something he needed to do before he could finally quit.

REALLY SAYING GOODBYE

The most public way to say goodbye to smoking is to have a public ceremony (even if only one other person is present). This focuses you most clearly on the implications of your decision, and brings both the greatest social pressure to accept the change and the greatest support from friends and family. If you do this, it might be important for you to use it as an occasion to acknowledge the good as well as the bad.

WHEN YOU HAVE QUIT

After you are quit, you will find out how often you get feelings of regret about not being able to smoke. It is important that you don't let these thoughts grow to dominate you. Use the Things You Will Miss form to write down all the things you will or might miss and categorise them into two groups: Those which you can find replacements for, and those that you will have to accept as losses.

CAN YOU SAY GOODBYE TO YOUR CIGARETTES?

Finding out how hard it might be to say goodbye involves getting a better sense of how attached you are to your smoking. If you want to find out how easy it is likely to be to walk away from smoking, try one or more of the following exercise.

Imagining never smoking again: Make the decision for yourself that you are never going to smoke again in a couple of days (when you next quit if you haven't yet). Then for the next day or two, every time you have a cigarette or have an urge to have one, focus on how you feel when you remind yourself that you will never smoke in this situation again. If it feels right in every situation then you are likely to find quitting fairly easy - you will still have to resist some cravings, but when you resist, they should rapidly go away.

For situations that you can't organize to be in, for example with smoker friends who are not around at the moment, or a really stressful situation, try to imagine yourself in those situations and no longer smoking. See how this makes you feel.

The more situations where this exercise makes you uncomfortable the bigger the challenge you face.

If you find this task too difficult, try one of these: They are easier to imagine and can also be done (at least in part) in real life.

The toy boat floating down river carrying your last cigarette: Imagine yourself standing by a fast-moving stream. Put your last cigarette (or pack) into a small boat, then put it into the stream and watch it float away. Keep in the front of your mind that this is your last cigarette. If you let it float out of sight, then you will never smoke again. Watch it go. Try to say goodbye. If you feel the urge to run after it, first ask yourself what you are losing. If it is too important to lose and you find yourself running after it and fishing it out of the stream, then you are not ready to say goodbye, just yet. You can also do this in a real stream if you can find a suitable one.

Watching your last cigarette burn: Alternatively, set a cigarette up somewhere where it can burn down gradually without setting anything on fire. Light it and watch it burn down. If you can watch until it goes out, you are ready, if you can't resist grabbing it and having a puff, you still have work to do. Note your reaction if the cigarette goes out before you expect it to. Do this exercise at a time when you haven't smoked for a while (it is too easy if you have just had one), and preferably with the last cigarette you have on you.

After you have done one of these exercises, note down the thoughts and feelings that came into your mind. Most smokers find these exercises hard, even if they manage to resist the urge to run after the cigarette or pick it up.

If you succeeded in letting go, then you are ready to quit and you are likely to find it fairly easy. It's even better if you felt a real sense of relief as your last cigarette disappeared.

If you did go after the cigarette, does this mean that you're not ready to quit? Not at all! Most smokers can't really give up on smoking until they have been stopped for a while, so it is still important to make your quit attempt, but to do so knowing that you will have moments when all you want to do is have a cigarette. If you resist these temptations, they will gradually disappear, or at least become easier to resist.

If you can't easily say "Goodbye", we suggest you break the task of quitting into more manageable chunks. Take things a day at a time, or even a cigarette at a time (see Getting through the Early Days).

WHAT YOUR RESPONSE TO THIS EXERCISE MEANS (MORE DETAIL)

You chose not to do the exercise or started it but couldn't let go of the cigarette or start watching it burn down:	You are still holding on to smoking. Quitting, in the early days is going to be a challenge, but it can still be done. You will have to work hard at convincing yourself that it really is in your interests to quit.
You went after the cigarette and rescued it (picked it up before it went out):	You are still holding on to smoking. In the early days quitting smoking is going to be a challenge, but it can still be done. The longer you lasted before you rescued the cigarette the easier it is likely to be.
You started to go after it, but were too late and it had gone (gone out):	You can quit successfully, but you will have some moments of doubt.
You started to run, but then stopped yourself (or: You picked it up, but put it back without puffing on it):	You have great self-control. You have all the skills you need to succeed. Just keep on letting go.
You felt a strong urge to run (pick it up), but resisted it:	As for those above you have great self-control. You have all the skills you need to succeed. Just keep on letting go.
You felt sad but had no strong urge to run after it:	You are psychologically well prepared to quit. It is likely to be relatively easy for you.
You didn't really feel much at all:	You either didn't do the exercise very well, or are likely to find quitting pretty easy (let's hope it is the latter!).
You actually felt a sense of relief:	Lucky you! You're likely to find quitting is easy, but you will still have to resist occasional temptations to smoke.

SMOKING DIARY

Each time you smoke a cigarette today, fill in the time, occasion or activity, what you were feeling and how much you craved a cigarette using the scale provided. You should also indicate whether you delayed the cigarette (either deliberately, or because you were unable to smoke), or smoked when you first felt like it. We recommend you do this for several days, using a separate form for each day.

Date: _____

No. cigarettes in pack (start of day): _____

No. cigarettes in pack (end of day): _____

New pack: ☐ Y ☐ N

Cigarettes used: _____

Number given away: _____

Total no. smoked: _____

CIGARETTE CRAVINGS SCALE

- 1 SMOKED WITHOUT THINKING
- 2 CRAVINGS, BUT DECIDED TO SMOKE
- 3 MEDIUM CRAVINGS
- 4 STRONG CRAVINGS
- 5 EXTREMELY STRONG CRAVINGS

SMOKING DIARY

[illegible]

CRAVINGS AND SMOKING DIARY

Use this diary to monitor your cigarette cravings after you have quit, or if you are cutting down. Make sure you record any cigarettes you smoke, even if you smoked them without having cravings first.

Indicate your response to cravings on the following scale:

Date: _____

CIGARETTE CRAVINGS SCALE

- 1** SMOKED WITHOUT THINKING
- 1** RESISTED EASILY
- 2** RESISTED WITH DIFFICULTY
- 3** RESISTED, BUT ONLY JUST
- 4** SMOKED AFTER RESISTING
- 5** SMOKED WITHOUT RESISTING
- 6** SMOKED WITHOUT PRIOR CRAVING

CRAVINGS AND SMOKING DIARY

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