

Kicking the Smoking Habit: You Have Choices

**By Kathleen Tucker, L.Ac., Dipl. Ac., C.Ht.
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Are you one of the thousands of smokers who made a New Year's Eve resolution to quit smoking? If so, then NOW is the best time to quit smoking. There are a variety of ways to quit and your greatest challenge may be finding the one that works best for you. Hospitals, doctors, health educators, the Department of Health, private practitioners and others offer a variety of methods to help kick the habit. Options available are the nicotine patch, anti-depressants, hypnotherapy, behavioral modification classes and more. Smoking Cessation has come a long way from the old fashion, "Cold Turkey" do-it-yourself method.

Whatever your strategy, quitting smoking is the best decision that you can make for yourself. Are you ready to kick the habit? Studies of smokers who successfully quit smoking show that one of the most important traits is the belief that they have the ability to lead a smoke free life. Believing you can quit is the cornerstone of which all your future decisions will be based. Believing means that you can envision your life as a non-smoker. It is as simple as imagining living life as a non-smoker. What would it be like: your daily routine, your health, visualize that you can move through life as a successful non-smoker. Your belief system will be the foundation of your efforts to achieve a smoke free life. The following are some tips on creating the mind-set of a non-smoker:

Realize that your old mind set (your reasons for starting to smoke and for maintaining your smoking habits) is based on old ideas and circumstances. Acknowledge that you would like to create a new mind set; thinking based on your motivations for being a non-smoker. For example, it is no longer cool or sophisticated to smoke. In fact, it is socially unacceptable. Smoking smells bad and it is a health hazard to all who inhale the smoke. Smoking indeed makes you look and feel older, in fact, by smoking you will prematurely age your body 10 times faster than a non-smoker. Smokers are no longer "one of the gang". Many public places outlaw smoking within 10 feet of the entrance of buildings and do not allow smoking at all inside the building. Smokers are seen huddled outside, sometimes in the parking lots of facilities, so that their habit does not offend or affect other people's health. Whatever your reasons for smoking, you can guarantee they are outdated reasons that don't support your goals and desire for a long and healthy life.

Make up positive statements and write them on a 3x5 index card. Statements can be: "I believe that I have the ability to quit smoking", "I am a non-smoker", "I control my life", "I am a powerful, self-directed person". You can also make your own positive statements. Read these statements to yourself at least three times a day. Practicing these statements will help shift your mindset. Transforming your mind set from negative to positive thoughts is like working out. The more you do it, the stronger your mind (body) becomes. You can also post these statements on your bathroom mirror to help remind you to repeat them. You may do this prior to actually quitting, so that before the big "quit date" you are already thinking positive.

Your next step is to list your motivations and challenges. Explore your daily pattern of smoking. Write down the times and occasions you are most likely to smoke.

Write down your “triggers”, those activities when you tend to smoke more i.e. talking on the phone, after a meal, driving in the car, etc. You may be surprised to find that you have organized your day around smoking.

Write down 10 activities you will do instead of smoking. You can also do these activities when you experience a craving or if you have thoughts of a cigarette. Activities might be to drink a glass of water, go for a short walk, call a friend, read a book, or do any activity that you enjoy, that is stress relieving and will help redirect your mind away from smoking. Write down all the things that you will enjoy doing after you quit smoking (greater endurance, breathing easier, fresh breath, clean smelling body and hair, more money, etc.) anything that you find motivating for you to quit and you are looking forward to achieving when you quit. When you have explored your motivations and challenges, you are ready for the next step.

Learn some relaxation techniques. Smoking often replaces relaxation. A smoker’s break allows the smoker to remove themselves from other activities. People, who have a difficult time taking a break without the excuse of a cigarette, may find themselves having difficulty relaxing and taking time for themselves. True relaxation is an art. It means clearing your mind, deepening your breath, resting so that your blood circulates without stress to the heart, and more. True relaxation is a learned skill. It means being comfortable with down time, enjoying alone time or time with friends, family and co-workers, without the prop of a cigarette or the escape of a cigarette. There are many books, tapes and classes that teach relaxation techniques and stress-reduction skills. Practice these skills prior to quitting. Remember you are mindfully creating a life that is smoke free. This means being able to handle stress with a healthy attitude and healthy activities. With relaxation techniques, you will be able to move through cravings or thoughts of cigarettes with greater ease and more control.

There are many things you can do to help your body move through the transition period of smoker to non-smoker. You can make these changes prior to quitting so that your body and mind are supported before the big “quit date”. Start and maintain a light exercise routine to help detoxify your body and help with stress. Regular sleep and a balanced diet will keep you nourished throughout the day and will reduce cravings that are triggered by hunger, low energy and fatigue. Drink 8 glasses of water a day and you will raise your metabolism, and poisons and carcinogens will wash from your body quicker. You may want to consult a holistic nutritionist for vitamin and herbal supplements that will support your body through withdraw, as well as, to help ease the psychological challenges for quitting smoking. Establish your support system: friends, trusted co-workers, and/or therapists and counselors that you are working with.

There are many professionals you can consult regarding your “kick the habit” plan. Your doctor may offer anti-depressants, anti-anxiety medications and/or anti-smoking medications like zyban. Many hospitals offer a 6 to 10 week program that educates and supports an individual to quit smoking. Calvert Memorial Hospital, as well as, Saint Mary’s and Civista Hospital offer such programs. These programs may include the nicotine patch, nicotine gum or other nicotine replacement products. The American Lung Association (www.lungusa.org) and Quit Smoking Association (www.quitsmoking.com) offer information and free programs through the Internet. As a hypnotherapist and acupuncturist, I have created a smoke free program that combines

hypnosis, relaxation techniques, acupuncture, education and nutritional/herbal recommendations.

Whatever your approach, your strategy will include a “quit date.” Decide on a specific date that you will quit smoking. Again, make sure you do this after you have explored your pattern and you’ve written down your affirmations and motivations. Choose a date that occurs during a low stress time, for example, on a Friday, so that you have the weekend to move through the first couple of days. Don’t try to quit during a stressful time such as the holidays, stressful times at work or during the breakup of a relationship, for example. The day before you quit, throw out all the items you use when smoking, such as cigarettes, ashtrays, lighters, etc. Do this at all locations that you smoke such as your home, office, car and wherever you have stored smoking items.

On your quit date, be good to yourself. Remember, you are re-educating your mind and body to be that of a non-smoker. Do what works for you. If keeping yourself busy helps you refocus your mind, then keep busy. If you are over-stressed and need down time, if possible, take some down time. Keep your affirmations close and remind your self daily of all the positive reasons for being a non-smoker. If the thought or craving for a cigarette appears, know that you can move through it, sometimes with great effort and sometimes with great ease. It will get easier. Avoid or keep to a minimum those activities or triggers that you associate with cigarettes i.e. talking on the phone, drinking or going to bars (if these are your triggers). Don’t take on anything else new for a while. Re-educating your mind and body is a commitment and quitting smoking requires your attention. If you smoke a cigarette you can get back on track. Use your support system: friends, family, therapists, etc. Reward yourself for each smoke free day.

What’s most important is that you don’t give up. Many smokers who have successfully given up cigarettes have made several attempts to quit smoking. For some, quitting smoking becomes a lengthy process. If you believe you can do it, you will. For some, they will quit the first time, for other’s it may take three or four attempts before you are smoke free. If you quit for a short period of time, than resume smoking, you are one step close to quitting for good. Just quit again. Keep doing it until you win, until you quit for life.

Whatever your approach, quitting smoking will take effort. Exploring the facts about smoking, discovering your motivations/challenges and creating a clear plan of action is your greatest asset for achieving a smoke free life.

There is a tremendous amount of information and support available. For additional information, contact the American Lung Association, the American Cancer Association and/or your local hospital or health department for community resources. Good luck and remember: you are worth every effort to live a healthy and happy, long life.