

Relapse Prevention: Staying Stopped



Have you quit smoking so many times it's practically a habit? Well, take heart. Research has shown that the more times you try to quit, the more likely you are to be successful the next time you try.¹ The fact that you may have failed in the past may actually increase your chances of success.

Why some ex-smokers start smoking again

As they become used to living smoke-free, they forget the reasons why they quit in the first place.

They lack a step-by-step overall plan for quitting that includes specific goals and personalized strategies to deal with all of their triggers to smoke.

They focus on the negative, such as how much they miss smoking rather than on the positive, such as how much healthier they feel.

They place themselves in situations where they are tempted to smoke.

Tips for staying quit. This time, for good!

Avoid temptation: The best way to defeat the temptation to smoke is to avoid it in the first place. Stay away from the places and the activities where you will want to smoke. Visit new places and try new activities. Avoid people who smoke.

Change your patterns and places: As a smoker, you probably smoked in certain places such as a favourite chair, or at certain times such as after dinner. Smoking may have become so automatic that you probably lit up without even thinking. After you quit, you will need to put some distance between you and those patterns and places. Sit in a different chair; go for a walk after dinner.

Ask for help: When we enlist the help of others, we increase our chances of success. Support from others is important for people who want to quit smoking.^{2,3} Some people ask their friends and family, others join smoking cessation groups or call quit smoking telephone lines. Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

Reduce your stress: Many smokers light up when they feel stressed. If you were one of them, don't let stress be a reason to start smoking again. When you feel the pressure building, take a moment to relax. Take a few deep, calming breaths, stretch, get some fresh air.

Many people think that smoking helps them relax, but this has been proven not to be the case. According to researchers at Dundee University in Scotland, smoking causes physical changes in your brain that inhibit transmission of serotonin, the body's natural stress-relieving hormone. As a result, smokers become deficient in serotonin and may suffer higher levels of stress.⁴

Develop a strategy to deal with the urge to smoke: For example, when you feel an urge to smoke, think of it like a wave. Watch the wave coming towards you, then wash over you and then fade away. Wait for calm to return.

Practice the 4 Ds: deep breaths, drink water, distract and delay:

When you feel a craving, breathe in and out slowly. Deep breathing will help you relax and make the craving go away.

Drink lots of water all day long, especially during a craving. Drinking water will flush out the toxins from your system.



Distract yourself by getting up and being active. Learn a new hobby that keeps your hands busy.

Keep in mind that most cravings will go away in 5 to 10 minutes – convince yourself that you will get through it.

Celebrate and reward yourself! Plan special celebrations on the weekly and monthly anniversary of your quit date. Calculate the money you've saved and continue to reward yourself with some of that money.

Remind yourself of the health benefits of being smoke free:⁵

Within 2 days of quitting, your senses of taste and smell will begin to improve.

Within 4 weeks of quitting, your blood circulation will improve, your lungs will work better and physical activity will become easier.

Within 1 year of quitting, your risk of coronary heart disease will drop to half.

Within 3 years, your risk of heart attack will be similar to that of someone who has never smoked.

After 5 years, you will reduce your risk of getting cancer of the lung, mouth, throat, bladder, kidney or pancreas.

¹ The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services website. *Help for Smokers: Ideas to help you quit*. Accessed March 14, 2008 from <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/helpsmok.htm>

² Park EW, Tudiver F, Schultz JK, Campbell T. Does enhancing partner support and interaction improve smoking cessation? A meta-analysis. *Annals of Family Medicine*. 2004;2:170-174. Accessed February 22, 2008 from <http://www.annfam.org/cgi/content/full/2/2/170>

³ May S, West R, Hajek P, McEwen A, McRobbie H. Randomized controlled trial of a social support ('buddy') intervention for smoking cessation. *Patient Educ Couns*. 2006;64(1-3):235-41. Accessed February 26, 2008 from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16616450?ordinalpos=5&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum

⁴ Balfour DJK. The neurobiology of tobacco dependence: A preclinical perspective on the role of the dopamine projections to the nucleus. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research* 2004;6:899-912. Accessed February 20, 2008 from <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a713726746~db=all>

⁵ Canadian Cancer Society. *One Step at a Time: For Smokers Who Want to Quit*. Accessed March 3, 2008 from: <http://www.smokershelpline.ca/custom/selfhelp.htm>

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