

Dying

For a



Smoke



A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions and those affected by them

Mark Twain said, "Quitting smoking is easy. I've done it a thousand times."

Maybe you've tried to quit, too. Why is quitting and staying quit hard for so many people? The answer is nicotine.

Nicotine – It's an Addiction

Nicotine is a drug found naturally in tobacco. It is as addictive as heroin or cocaine. Over time, a person becomes physically and emotionally addicted to (dependent on) nicotine. Studies have shown that smokers must deal with both the physical and mental (psychological) dependence to quit and stay quit.

"I found myself preoccupied with the clock, just like when I was drinking! 'When can I light up?' is all I could think about. I had been clean and sober for 7 years and here I was obsessing. And the guilt and shame I felt whenever someone at church saw me smoking – I was acting like it was crack cocaine or something!"

Nicotine addiction claims far more lives world-wide than any other form of drug use. Most cigarette smokers still smoke because they are addicted to nicotine.

Nicotine is an alkaloid drug synthesized by the tobacco plant in the same way that the opium poppy (source of heroin) and the coca plant (source of cocaine) synthesize their addictive substances. Experts agree that addiction to nicotine can be just as strong as addiction to cocaine or heroin. Smokers continue using nicotine despite awareness of its harmful effects. They experience intense cravings for the drug and many relapse following a period of abstinence. Nicotine is only one of an estimated 4,000 potentially toxic chemicals in cigarette smoke but it is the major reason people keep smoking. Nearly 70% of current smokers claim they really don't want to smoke, but have not been able to maintain abstinence on their own.

"I smoke because I like to smoke." Does this sound familiar? Many of us, in looking back, realize that we didn't "like" smoking – we just really didn't like how we felt not smoking!

Smoking – The Process

Nicotine is inhaled into the lungs on particles of cigarette smoke, and enters the blood almost as quickly as if injected into a vein. Within ten seconds it binds to brain cells and they pour out hormones and other chemical compounds. One cigarette creates the need for another. Since the body recognizes nicotine as toxic and quickly destroys it, smokers must repeat the dose. They adjust the dosage unconsciously by timing the frequency of each smoke to maintain a comfortable level of the drug in their bloodstream. Too high a concentration of nicotine may lead to headaches or light-headedness, indicating an overdose, and if blood levels of nicotine drop too far, withdrawal symptoms set in – anxiety, irritability and an intense, overwhelming craving for more of the drug.

Tobacco and Disease

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC):

- Tobacco use causes cancer, heart disease and lung diseases (including emphysema, bronchitis and chronic airway obstruction).
- Cigarette smoking increases the length of time that people live with a disability by about 2 years.
- For every person who dies from a smoking-related disease, 20 more people suffer with at least one serious illness from smoking.
- Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of death.
Cigarette smoking is responsible for about 1 in 5 deaths annually.
- Many tobacco-related deaths are the result of second- hand smoke exposure.

Attempts to Quit

Many adult smokers want or try to quit smoking:

- Approximately 70% of smokers want to quit completely.
- Approximately 40% of smokers try to quit each year.

“It was the hardest thing I ever did” say many ex-smokers, and many more find it takes a surprisingly long time to lose the mental desire to “light up”. Even though the physical cravings subside within a month or two, it has been reported that people who have stopped for as many as 10 years can still, on occasion, desire to smoke “just one”.

Some people simply stop by themselves. Light smokers or short-term smokers have the easiest time quitting. Heavier smokers may experience withdrawal symptoms ranging from irritability and restlessness to insomnia and even “night sweats”. Unlike other substances (such as alcohol), there have been no deaths or major symptoms (e.g. seizures or internal bleeding) attributed to nicotine withdrawal. Quitting is still very uncomfortable, though, and the thought of repeating the process of detoxification can be an excellent reason not to start again. If you do “slip”, the sooner you stop again, the easier the withdrawal will be. The important thing to remember is that **you really wanted to quit to begin with**, so you keep at it. Remember, you are not alone. There are so many others who want you to succeed for no reason other than that it is to your benefit to do so.

It has been reported that much of the physical damage done by smoking begins to reverse as soon as you stop. Lung capacity, blood pressure and sense of smell and taste improve.

There are so many good reasons to quit – medical, social and economic – and really only one reason to continue to smoke... **because you can't stop by yourself!** When you admit this (confess) to yourself, you can begin your journey. God can do for you what you cannot do for yourself and He is a great fan of support groups.

They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46-47 (NLT)

How Overcomers Outreach Can Help

God's Word, 12-Step recovery principles and loving support in a secure and confidential environment come together at Overcomers Outreach meetings. No one is concerned with what the specific problem is. We focus on the solution, namely guidance from Scripture and faith in Jesus Christ, our “higher power”. There are other people, just like you, who are overcoming nicotine and other addictions. The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous help us on the road to recovery. The first step is to admit you are powerless over nicotine and that your life has become unmanageable” (I can't). The second step is that you “Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity” (God can). The third step says “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him” (I think I'll let Him). In the Bible, Jeremiah 32:27 tells us “*I am the Lord, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me?*” (NLT) Not even Marlboros! The truth is that many have stopped and are free from their addiction to nicotine.

“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you FREE!”

John 8:32 (NLT)

Get Help

There are many resources available to help you quit and stay quit. The internet is an excellent source of information on stopping and staying stopped. Consult your physician, local hospital or health clinic for other resources. The use of nicotine “patches” or gum has proven to be very helpful getting through the “early days”. The latest medical technology offers some new medications that block the physical cravings and reduce withdrawal symptoms. These all should be used under medical supervision and are intended to help during the initial cessation period. But for the long haul, accountability partnerships and support groups are far and away the most effective.

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