

CONQUERING THE SMOKING HABIT

Most smokers sincerely want to quit. They know cigarettes threaten their health, set a bad example for their children, annoy their acquaintances and cost an inordinate amount of money.

Nobody can force a smoker to quit. It's something each person has to decide for himself, and will require a personal commitment by the smoker. What kind of smoker are you? What do you get out of smoking? What does it do for you? It is important to identify what you use smoking for and what kind of satisfaction you feel that you are getting from smoking.

Many smokers use the cigarette as a kind of crutch in moments of stress or discomfort, and on occasion it may work; the cigarette is sometimes used as a tranquilizer. But the heavy smoker, the person who tries to handle severe personal problems by smoking heavily all day long, is apt to discover that cigarettes do not help him deal with his problems effectively.

When it comes to quitting, this kind of smoker may find it easy to stop when everything is going well, but may be tempted to start again in a time of crisis. Physical exertion, eating, drinking, or social activity in moderation may serve as useful substitutes for cigarettes, even in times of tension. The choice of a substitute depends on what will achieve the same effects without having any appreciable risk.

Once a smoker understands his own smoking behavior, he will be able to cope more successfully and select the best quitting approaches for himself and the type of life-style he leads.

Because smoking is a form of addiction, 80 percent of smoker who quit usually experience some withdrawal symptoms. These may include headache, light-headedness, nausea, diarrhea, and chest pains. Psychological symptoms, such as anxiety, short-term depression, and inability to concentrate, may also appear. The main psychological symptom is increased irritability. People become so irritable, in fact, that they say they feel "like killing somebody." Yet there is no evidence that quitting smoking leads to physical violence.

Some people seem to lose all their energy and drive, wanting only to sleep. Others react in exactly the opposite way, becoming so over energized they can't find enough activity to burn off their excess energy. For instance, one woman said she cleaned out all her closets completely and was ready to go next door to start on her neighbor's. Both these extremes, however, eventually level off. The symptoms may be intense for two or three days, but within 10 to 14 days after quitting, most subside. The truth is that after people quit smoking, they have more energy, they generally will need less sleep, and feel better about themselves.

Quitting smoking not only extends the ex-smoker's life, but adds new happiness and meaning to one's current life. Most smokers state that immediately after they quit smoking, they start noticing dramatic differences in their overall health and vitality.

Quitting is beneficial at any age, no matter how long a person has been smoking. The mortality ratio of ex-smoker decreases after quitting. If the patient quits before a serious disease has developed, his body may eventually be able to restore itself almost completely.