

Breaking Away from the 'POISONOUS' Habit

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GIVEN THE INSIDIOUS AND PERVASIVE nature of poisoning associated with cigarette smoking, the surest way to prevent such poisoning is to QUIT. However to break any bad habit is never a simple matter.

According to a Gallup Poll, that success rate is rather dismal. This is mainly due to the addictive properties of nicotine.

You need an enormous amount of willpower to sustain such an effort to kick the habit of smoking. The whole process perhaps is a that of re-learning, that is, to once again learn how to live without cigarettes.

After all, cigarette smoking, like other drugs of abuse, is indeed a learned behaviour and much of this has to be unlearned before one can successfully call it a quits. As such, there are no hard and fast rules about how to stop smoking. It therefore important to recognise some of the barriers associated with the process of quitting.

There are at least three recognisable barriers. They are namely physical, social and psychological barriers. Physical barriers are those that are associated with the act of smoking itself, and involves mainly the mouth (oral barrier) and the fingers (manipulative barrier). All smokers have developed that habit of putting something in the mouth and this is a habit that they have grown used to. Many more will associate this as a type of oral gratification.

Aiding this process is a host of manipulative skills involving mainly the fingers. These include the act of taking out the cigarette pack from the pocket, then pulling out a cigarette from the pack, putting it in the mouth, igniting it and holding it in the hand in between puffs.

All these are a matter of routine for seasoned smokers, especially when confronted with certain situations. Hence to dispense with such habits would require enormous effort. In most situations, those involved feel a kind of emptiness without a cigarette in hand.

Then, there is the social barrier. A cigarette often plays the role of a social ice-breaker, the grease that smoothes relationships or even a public relation agent; to be without it will suddenly make someone feel insecure or totally lost in a crowd unfamiliar to him.

In such cases, a cigarette would perhaps be a "friend" that a smoker could not dispense with when faced with some social predicament. Moreover, cigarettes can keep him busy, with his mouth and finger at least to make him less jittery. This then adds on to the difficulty of breaking the smoking habit.

Worst of all is the mental barrier. The thought of going through a potentially stressful situation can result in an unwillingness to be without a cigarette.

To make matters worse, cigarettes have been proved beyond doubt to be an addictive substance - not unlike other drugs of abuse. As such, to breach the mental barrier so that you can lead a smoke-free lifestyle becomes an enormously challenging task.

In fact, the effect on cigarettes on the brain is the main cause for a person to carry on smoking. Fortunately, a number of strategies can be adopted to try and quit the habit. A few of them that are worth considering include the following:

1. Take cognisance of all the barriers that will most likely turn your effort to quit into a failure.
2. Try to substitute the said barrier(s) with something else that do not involve a cigarette. For example, in order to keep your mouth busy, try candies or chewing gums instead. Substitute a small pocketbook containing motivational quotes about quitting smoking in place of a packet of cigarettes. Tie rubber bands around your wrist or finger so that you can keep your fingers busy.
3. Learn how to get rid of stress and tension without resorting to smoking. Take up games, jogging, exercise and so on.
4. Ponder upon things or situations that automatically trigger you to smoke. List them down and be aware of the possible substitute(s) that you can use to fall back on. For example, if drinking coffee stimulates you to smoke, avoid it, or otherwise, try other drinks.
5. Be affirmative about what you are going through. Convince yourself that you are in control by talking to yourself in a positive way: I want to quit smoking (not: I have to quit smoking). This is particularly useful when dealing with other smokers who insist that you should smoke for old times sake. Take affirmative action by saying NO.
6. Clear your home, workplace or places that you spend a lot of time in, of things relating to smoking - ashtray, matches, lighters, and of course, cigarette boxes, empty or otherwise. This should include pockets in jackets and trousers and handbags for ladies.
7. Clean yourself from any remnants of the smoking habits. For example, get rid of the stains on your teeth or nails, freshen up any odour of stale smoke on your hair or even clothing.

8. List out all the benefits - financial, health, relationships - you would like to achieve by quitting smoking. These will give you more reasons /motivation to stop smoking.
9. Take notice of all the good things that has happened to you once you stop smoking. For example, the time saved in looking for cigarettes, lighting and puffing it, the cleanliness and freshness of the place around you, fewer harassment from non-smoking colleagues or loved ones and so on. Most of these are overlooked and taken for granted.
10. Avoid advertisements, direct or indirect, about smoking if it tends to weaken you willpower to quit. This includes colleagues who smokes and places where smoking are allowed.

The good news is the longer you can sustain from taking a puff, the greater will be the tendency that you will succeed.

So keep on at it for a long as it takes. If you have an urge to smoke, try to postpone it for 30 seconds. If you succeed, that the next 30 seconds will not be such a big deal. Then prolong it even further and eventually, it will disappear.

In fact, it has been shown that most smokers who decide to quit smoking do so abruptly rather than gradually cutting down.

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