



My Healthier Life

Three short months after quitting, I was able to stop taking my blood pressure medication because it had returned to a normal, stable level. I also began to exercise, and I worked hard to cut stress from my life. One year later, on my 49th birthday, I was reminded of where I was in life the year before: on a ventilator and fighting for my life. Now I was healthy and smoke-free!

Unfortunately, I put my health on the back burner for years due to my smoking. Nearly losing my life made me realize I could no longer let smoking control me, my body, or my future.

Here I am, one year later and I am happier than I have been in years. I decided to take control of my life and make changes that at one time felt impossible. Now, there is nothing I enjoy more than trying to help others realize their goal of freedom from smoking. I do it by helping my patients make their quit plans and by sharing my story with smokers who are on their journey to a smoke-free life. My success gives them hope that they too can quit smoking for good and look forward to a healthier life.

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Produced by

The Tobacco Research
and Intervention Program
at Moffitt Cancer Center

Funded by

Grants from the
National Institutes of Health
(R01CA134347; R01DA037961)

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The content is solely the responsibility
of the authors and does not necessarily
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National Institutes of Health

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JK 9/2016

The people depicted in this series were inspired by real individuals,
but the particulars were changed to protect their privacy.



**A FOREVER FREE
CLOSE-UP**

**“How
I Quit
Smoking”**

***Candice's
Story***

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My Old Life As A Smoker

Hello, my name is Candice, and I am a 49-year-old nurse aide. The first time I tried a cigarette was with my older sister when I was 14 years old. I didn't like the way it tasted, but it did make me feel older and closer to my sister. Many of my friends also smoked, so I was offered cigarettes all the time. Before I knew it, I was buying my own cigarettes and smoking every day.

By the time I was in my mid-40s, I knew my health was being harmed by my addiction. I needed to start thinking about quitting. I was constantly waking up at night coughing. When I would wake up in the morning, I'd hack and wheeze for about 30 minutes. My family history also told me I should quit. Two of my uncles died of smoking-related illnesses, and there was a long history of heart disease in my family. My blood pressure was already high. I was taking medication to keep it under control.



My Life Changing Event



Despite all those hard facts, I kept putting off any serious plans to quit smoking. All this changed on my 25th wedding anniversary. Little did I know it would be the anniversary that would change the way I viewed my life as a smoker. As my husband and I were getting ready to leave for a weekend away, I took a bad spill down our stairs. He rushed me to the hospital where they told us that I had shattered a vertebra in my back. Worst of all, I was going to need surgery.

Being a nurse aide, I was aware that smokers do not handle anesthesia well. I knew I had to quit if I wanted a successful surgery, but I still continued to smoke. I did cut back to a half a pack a day. That was the best I thought I could do.

When I woke up from surgery, I was horrified to find that I was on a ventilator. What happened!? I learned that after surgery I went into respiratory distress and could not breathe well on my own. As a result, I needed a ventilator for 38 days. My doctor told me my lungs were in bad shape after years of smoking. He said I would have emphysema within two years if I did not stop smoking.

Two months later I was released from the hospital. The craziest part was that I found myself craving a cigarette once again. I knew I did not want to go through this horrible experience again, so this time I had to quit, for good.



How I Quit Smoking

I realized that I would have to change my life, habits, and mind in order to live smoke-free. I also knew it wouldn't be easy. The changes would happen slowly. There is no magic button you can push to quit smoking.

I planned a quit-smoking program over the course of the next month. I read everything about quitting smoking that I could find. Like many people trying to quit, I wanted as few surprises as possible. I was sure I wanted to quit more than I wanted to keep smoking. Part of my quit plan was to use a nicotine patch. Based on what I read, gradually weaning off the nicotine after smoking a pack a day for 15 years made the best sense to me.

In addition to dealing with nicotine withdrawal I knew I was going to have to learn to live without smoking. I have a stressful job, and I used smoking as a way to handle the stress. I had to learn how to deal with life's ups and downs without a smoke. I learned to do this one day at a time.