2. There are things you can do to prevent gaining weight. Eating healthy and exercising are very important.

3. Gaining a few pounds is much better for your health than smoking.

4. Try not to panic about gaining weight. You can lose those few pounds once your body gets back to normal.

Good luck and know that you are making a healthy choice! Your body will thank you.

FOREVER FREE®

Produced by
The Tobacco Research
and Intervention Program
at Moffitt Cancer Center

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

1 (877) 954-2548

Projectease@MOFFITT.org

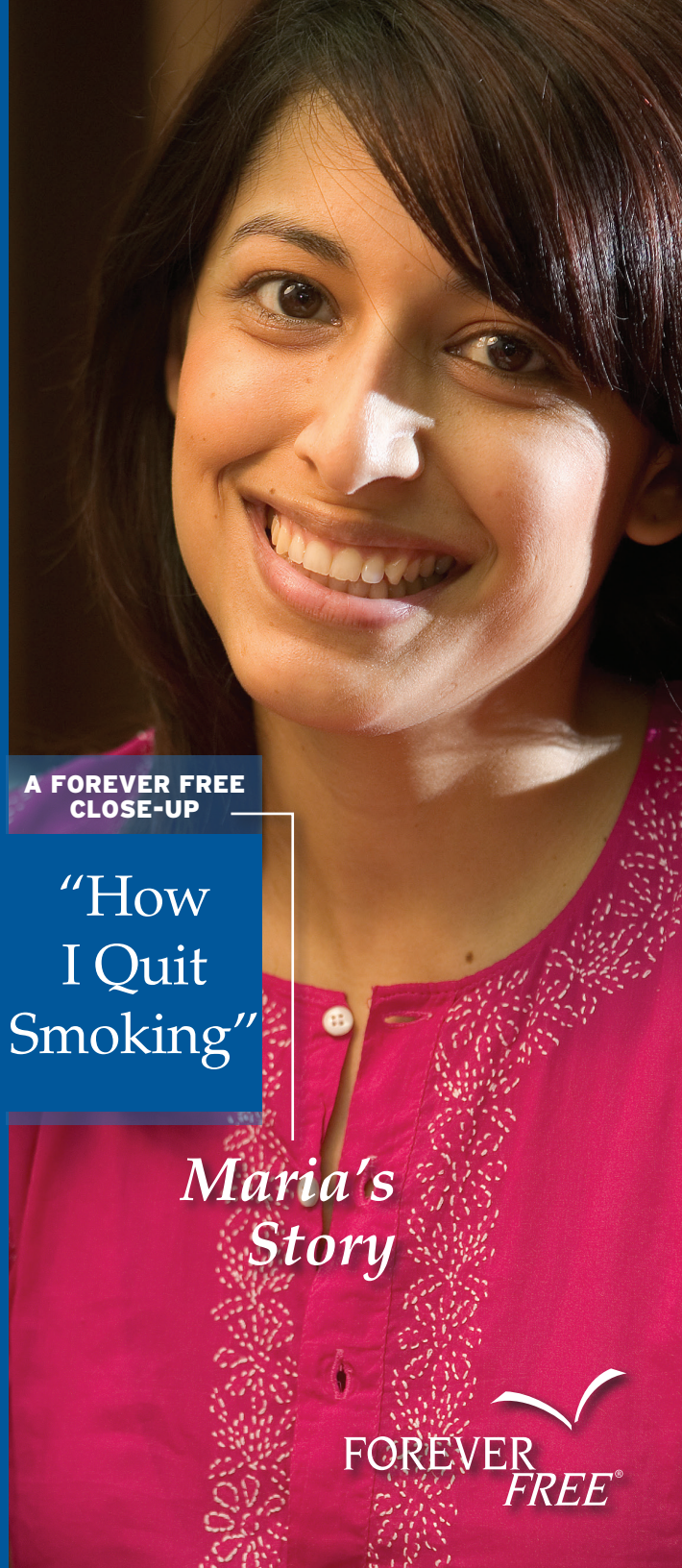
The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health

MOFFITT CANCER CENTER

© 2016 Moffitt Cancer Center. All rights reserved.

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"

Maria's Story

FOREVER FREE®

How It All Started

My name is Maria, and I am a 28 year-old hair stylist. For as long as I can remember, I have struggled with my weight. I think I was always on a diet in high school. My weight would go up and down a lot. In my junior year, a friend convinced me to try smoking as a way to control my appetite and weight. I didn't like the idea, but I was willing to try anything to lose a few pounds. For the first few months I only smoked one or two cigarettes every few days. I smoked mostly when I felt hungry between meals. I have to admit, I ate less when I smoked. It didn't take long before I was smoking every day. By my senior year I was smoking up to a pack a day. It got expensive but keeping my weight down was worth it.

By the time I was in my mid-twenties, I reached a weight that I was pretty happy with. Being active kept me from gaining weight. I was on my feet most of the day at work, which probably helped too. Although the thought of quitting smoking crossed my mind, I was afraid to try. I heard too many stories of people gaining a lot of weight after quitting smoking.

Time to Quit

Over the next few years I started noticing some health problems. They were not very obvious at first. I was always getting colds and they seemed to take a long time to go away. Sometimes, I would get a cough that lasted for weeks. People would often look at me because I coughed so much. Over time, I began to worry about my health. I was coughing a lot first thing in the morning and started to feel out of breath climbing stairs. I noticed this more when I was at the gym. I decided that it was finally time to quit smoking. But how?

My first attempt was when I woke up one morning and decided that I was just not going to smoke again. I threw away the cigarettes I still had and I felt great for the first three days. Don't get me wrong, I had cravings, mostly between meals. But I tried to chew on some gum or munch on a healthy snack. Sometimes, I couldn't resist the strong urges I had for sweets. The real challenge started when I went back to an old habit of weighing myself each morning.

Once I saw the pounds adding up on the scale, my cravings to smoke became too strong. All I could think about was that I didn't want to gain any more weight. Soon, I started to smoke one or two cigarettes each day. I promised myself that I would only smoke between meals. Well, that didn't last very long. After a few weeks I was back to a pack a day. I realized that I needed to plan ahead and I needed help.

How I Lost My Addiction and Gained My Freedom and Health

After reading about quitting smoking and weight gain, I met with my doctor to talk about the best plan for me. I found out that using medications can help with the cravings. It can also help keep me from gaining a lot of weight. I decided to try the nicotine inhaler because I wanted to be able to use it whenever I had cravings to eat between meals. I picked a new quit day and I prepared myself this time. I planned out the first week, including my meals and exercise. I also put away my scale and decided to weigh myself just once a week. After about 4 weeks of being smoke-free, I gained 3 lbs. But, I didn't let it get me down or keep me from my main goal of a smoke-free life.

I have been smoke-free now for 6 months, and I feel great. The few pounds I gained in those first few months after quitting have slowly come off. The most important things that I learned about quitting smoking while watching my weight are:

1. The fear of gaining weight is much worse than the actual weight gain. Not everyone gains weight when they quit, but the average weight gain is about 8-10lbs.