



SMOKING URGES

This is Booklet 2 in the *Stop Smoking for Good* series. The first booklet was an overview of important information about quitting smoking and staying off of tobacco cigarettes. This booklet covers smoking urges in more detail.

CONTENTS

What Are Urges?	2
Different Types of Urges	2
How to Deal with Urges to Smoke	8
Does Medication Help?	11
When Will the Urges End?	11
Exercises	12
Remember...	12

What Are Urges?

Urges. Cravings. Desires. They all describe how smokers and ex-smokers feel when they want a cigarette. These words can have different meanings for different people. For example, some smokers say that a “craving” is stronger than an “urge.” But most people agree --- these words mean pretty much the same thing. In this booklet, we will use all three words to mean the same thing.

Different Types of Urges

Ex-smokers may have at least three kinds of cigarette urges:

- Nicotine withdrawal urges
- Habit urges
- Memories of smoking



1 Nicotine Withdrawal Urges

Over your years of smoking, your body adjusted to the nicotine. Many of your organs made changes to get used to the effects of nicotine. These organs include your brain and your heart. The changes let you smoke without feeling all the effects of nicotine that you felt when you first started smoking. For example, you may have felt lightheaded when you first started and now you don't. Your pulse no longer races as fast. But, when you quit smoking “cold turkey,” your body adjusts again. This time, your brain, heart, and other organs now have to get used to you not smoking! These changes can feel unpleasant and they are called *nicotine withdrawal*. Symptoms of withdrawal include:

- lightheadedness
- sleep problems
- decreased heart rate
- craving for cigarettes
- increased appetite
- difficulty thinking
- headache
- nausea (sick to your stomach)
- depression (feeling sad)
- irritability
- anxiety (feeling tense)
- constipation

Most people do not have all of these symptoms, but most do have some. Nicotine withdrawal begins about 20 minutes after your last cigarette. Once you stop smoking, withdrawal symptoms last one or two weeks. There are three ways to stop these unpleasant symptoms:

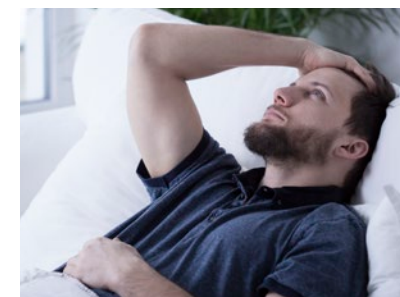
1. Wait for it to end on its own after one or two weeks.
2. Use nicotine replacement products such as nicotine gum or patch, or use another stop-smoking medication, such as Zyban® or CHANTIX™.
3. Smoke a cigarette.

The first two ways are how many people quit smoking. But it is very tempting to get relief the third way - by smoking a cigarette. This temptation is the “nicotine withdrawal urge.” Smokers get this urge about 20 minutes after smoking their last cigarette.



Why do most smokers say that their strongest craving for a cigarette is first thing in the morning? It is

because their body has been without nicotine for several hours while they were sleeping.



How long do ex-smokers have nicotine withdrawal urges? As long as nicotine withdrawal lasts. This is about one to two weeks after quitting smoking. Often a smoker tries to quit but does not completely quit smoking. He or she may have one or two cigarettes per day to deal with urges. This “cheating” just makes nicotine withdrawal last longer. The “quick fix” actually causes more problems.



What does a nicotine withdrawal urge feel like? If you have ever quit smoking, you may remember the feeling very well. Urges are hard to describe. Many say that this type of urge feels physical. This makes sense --- this urge happens because of physical changes in your body. One ex-smoker told us that these urges felt like “a stone was in my chest.” This is a good way to describe the feeling.

2 Habit Urges

Once a smoker has quit for long enough, nicotine withdrawal urges go away. Habit urges, on the other hand, may be a longer problem. Habit urges are tied to situations. We can explain habit urges with these examples:

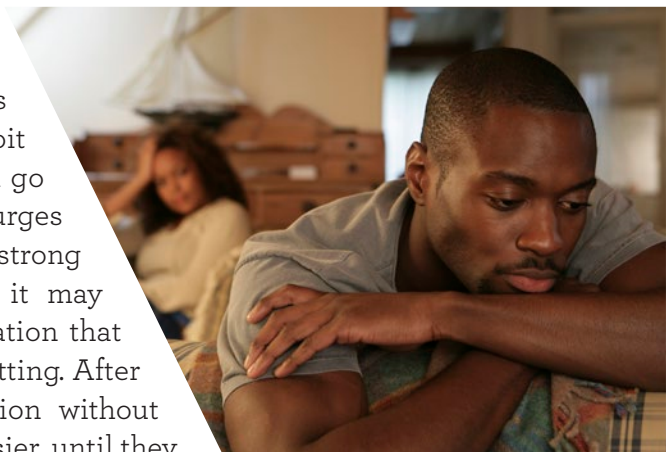
- a. **Mariana** always smoked while talking on the phone. Whenever her cell phone rang, she would reach for her pack and light a cigarette. But three weeks after quitting, she still wants to smoke when she hears her ringtone.
- b. **Wesley** was a regular pool player. For him, pool and smoking used to go together like ham and eggs. When he was trying to quit smoking, Wesley stayed away from the pool hall for three weeks. Now that he feels that he has cigarettes kicked, he has started playing pool again. To his surprise, that first night back caused cravings for cigarettes. And seeing all of his buddies smoking only seemed to make it worse.
- c. **Jestene** and her sister started smoking cigarettes together as teens. Although they now live 500 miles apart, whenever they get back together they tend to smoke while catching up. Jestene has grown to value the special times that she has with her sister once or twice a year. There is a strong sister bond between them at these times. Since their last visit, Jestene has quit smoking. She has not smoked for five months now, and she has had very little desire to smoke. But at the next visit, when they sat down to catch up, Jestene's sister pulled out her pack and offered Jestene a cigarette. Jestene had a strong urge to smoke. Smoking seemed like the thing to do.
- d. **Peter** had been smoke-free for nearly a year, and he was proud of it. Last week, while driving his daughter to soccer practice, he was rear-ended by a drunk driver. He was not hurt, but his daughter broke both her legs. One person at the scene of the accident was smoking, and Peter felt that he too needed a cigarette to deal with the stress.

These four stories were told to us by former smokers. In each story, something from the past set off an urge to smoke. For Mariana, it was the cell phone. For Wesley, it was being at the pool hall. For Jestene, it was her sister. And for Peter it was stress. All of these are “triggers” that cause an urge. Triggers can be people, places, things, and even moods.

Here is a list of some common triggers for habit urges:

- Talking on the phone
- Driving a car
- Seeing cigarettes or someone smoking
- Being with an old smoking buddy
- Having a fight with family
- Feeling bored
- Celebrating
- Finishing a job
- Eating
- Drinking coffee
- Feeling angry, sad, or nervous
- Feeling **STRESSED**
- Feeling lonely
- Trying to solve a problem
- Drinking alcohol

As you can see, a lot of different things can cause habit urges. The good news is that you will not have habit urges forever. The longer you go without smoking, the fewer urges you will have. If you have a strong urge months after quitting, it may be because you are in a situation that you had not been in since quitting. After you get through that situation without smoking the urges will get easier, until they go away. The story on the next page explains how this worked for one ex-smoker:



Darrell had his last cigarette over two months ago. He and his family were planning on eating out at Darrell's favorite restaurant. The restaurant used to be a hang-out for Darrell and his buddies. The restaurant just went "no smoking," and it was Darrell's first time there since he had quit. During the hour-long dinner, Darrell had a strong craving for cigarettes. He told himself that he did not want to start smoking again. He made it through the meal without having a cigarette. It seemed like the longest hour of his life. However, on his next visit to the restaurant, Darrell was very surprised to find that he was not bothered by smoking urges at all!



For Darrell, being at his favorite diner was his trigger. At the first visit after quitting, he had strong urges. But because he did not give in to the urges, the next time he ate there he did not have any problem with urges. Urges do not always go away so easily after only one time with a trigger situation. But all urges will fade with time if you don't smoke.

A big trigger that can cause strong urges long after quitting is STRESS. Most smokers deal with stress by having a cigarette. So, after you quit smoking, wanting a cigarette when you're feeling stressed is common.

Lisa had not smoked in 3 months, and she rarely had any desire to smoke. But today her work supervisor told her that the company would be laying off 50% of its workers. Half the people in Lisa's department would be getting laid off next week. The supervisor did not know who would stay and who would be let go. As jobs were hard to find, Lisa became very worried about losing her job. After hearing the news, she had strong urges to smoke. She found herself thinking, "Who cares if I start smoking again? That's nothing like not having a job!" But, she did not smoke, and by the third day the urges were gone, even though she was still stressed.

Lisa did get laid off. But even then, she did not start smoking again. Like Lisa, in times of stress, many people start thinking that staying off cigarettes is not as important anymore. When a loved one dies, you might feel that you need a cigarette to cope. You may think, "Who cares if I smoke again?" But many people who start smoking because of stress regret it later, after the stressful event has passed.

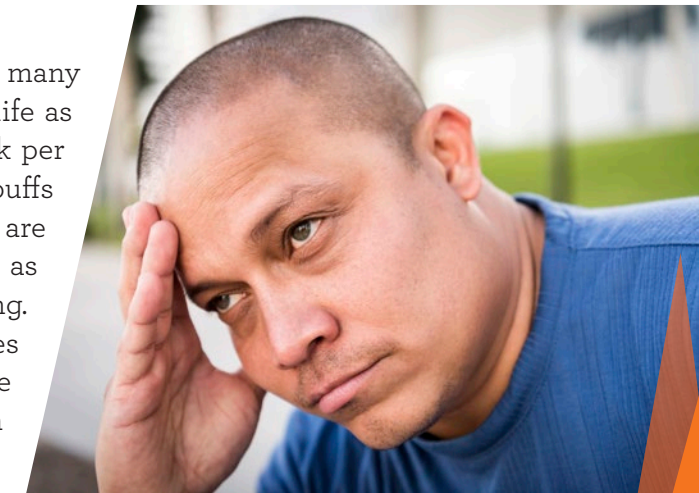
Joe had been a fire fighter for 23 years. One day he had an accident on the job, and he was paralyzed below the waist. He could not keep doing his work, and he depended on others for nearly everything. He no longer cared if he got cancer or heart disease, and he started smoking again. Six months later, once the shock of his accident slowly faded, he was sorry he started smoking. "It was bad enough being a man in a wheelchair," he said, "but now I am a smoker in a wheelchair. That's two strikes against me. Besides, now I want to live!" He signed up for quit smoking classes and was able to quit again.



It is important to note that good moods can also trigger habit urges. You may have smoked cigarettes when you were feeling good or when something good happened. When this happens after you quit, you may have urges to smoke. We know people who started smoking again when they were having a good time, like at a wedding. Remember, habit urges are tied to situations. The urges will get easier if you get through the situation without smoking.

3 Memories of Smoking

You probably smoked for many, many years. You lived much of your life as a smoker. If you smoked a pack per day, you took about 70,000 puffs on cigarettes each year. There are few things that you have done as many times, besides breathing. So you will have many memories of smoking. Seeing someone smoking, an old song, a certain food, old friends. These are memory triggers. An urge can happen when a smoking memory occurs. But the urge is so mild, that the smoker can deal with it. People who quit smoking many years ago sometimes say that they still have urges to smoke. They are mostly talking about memories they have from when they were smokers.



How to Deal with Urges to Smoke

There are three key ways to deal with smoking urges without smoking. They are:

- Think ahead
- Prepare for the urge
- Cope with the urge



1 Think Ahead

It is important to think about the types of situations that will be hard for you. These are the kinds of situations listed on page 5. If you can think ahead, you can plan and prepare ahead. For example, before going to a wedding, you can tell yourself that the reception may cause urges to smoke. Or, if you have a stressful event coming up – a day in court, perhaps – you can tell yourself that you may crave a cigarette. If you used to smoke at baseball games, and the first game since you quit smoking is next week, you can think ahead that you might want to smoke.

2 Prepare for the Urge

Thinking ahead is only part of the solution. You also need to prepare for it. What can you do if you have an urge when the situation arrives? Can you leave the situation? Can you have candy or a carrot stick to chew until the urge passes? What can you tell yourself in the situation that will help you get through it? Think ahead before you get to a hard situation and then prepare with a plan. Now you will be ready when the urge comes.

3 Cope With the Urge

This is the real key. Coping skills are the things that you do or tell yourself to get your mind off cigarettes. Research shows that people who use coping skills are much more likely to stay quit than people who don't. People who rely on "willpower" tend to start smoking again. There are two types of coping skills that you can use: behavioral and mental.

Behavioral coping skills are things that you can do... actions that you take. Here is a list:

- Leave the situation.
- Call or talk to a friend who will listen.
- Exercise.
- Use nicotine gum or another nicotine replacement product.
- Take deep breaths.
- Have a drink of water.
- Eat or chew on something (gum, candy, vegetables).
- Do a relaxation exercise.
- Keep your hands busy - play cards, sew, write, play a game on your phone.
- Take a shower.
- Do something with a non-smoker.
- Do something else, like read, write, or listen to music.

Mental coping skills are things that you can tell yourself. Here is a list:

- Remind yourself of the reasons you wanted to quit.
- Think of how long you have been cigarette free. You do not want to start over again.
- Think of how you got through this situation in the past without smoking.
- Try to figure out what is making you want a cigarette now.
- Tell yourself that smoking will not solve any problem. It will only create new ones.
- Surf the urge. Imagine the urge is a wave that builds up, then breaks. Imagine you are a surfer riding the urge wave, rather than being "wiped out" by it.
- Think of how your health is improving because you quit smoking.
- Tell yourself that *smoking is not an option*.

That last mental coping skill is the all-time favorite of our smoking clients. They say that telling themselves...

... “Smoking is not an option”...

...is simple and works well for them. Anything else may be an option, but not smoking! You may like some of these coping skills better than others. That’s OK. What matters is that you do something when you have an urge to smoke. Some research shows that it is best to use both behavioral and mental coping skills when you have an urge. There is one thing you want to avoid doing when you have an urge. You do not want to beat yourself up. Ex-smokers who tell themselves “I am so weak,” or “I was so stupid to ever smoke,” tend to start smoking again. Your coping skills should be positive, not negative.

HELPFUL HINT If you ever slip and have a cigarette, you can use these coping skills to avoid smoking any more. (More on this in another *Stop Smoking For Good*® booklet.)

Does Medication Help?

We recommend that all smokers use medication as an aid to quitting smoking. Nicotine replacement products such as patch, gum, inhaler, nasal spray, or lozenge are good choices. Your doctor may also prescribe a pill such as Zyban® or CHANTIX™. These medications all reduce nicotine withdrawal symptoms and urges. They may also help with habit urges. For example, when you have a very strong urge to smoke, you may use a piece of nicotine gum or take a nicotine lozenge. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about these products. They will help you choose the one that seems best for you.



When Will the Urges End?

Nicotine withdrawal urges usually last only one or two weeks if you don’t smoke. Habit urges slowly go away as you have different situations without smoking. However, new situations or a lot of stress can still trigger urges. Most people who have quit for a year or more rarely have habit urges. You may always have memories of smoking. Some of these will be pleasant memories, but most ex-smokers do not feel strong urges to smoke while having these memories.

Remember. Think Ahead...Prepare...and Cope to get you through even the worst urges to smoke.

What If I’m Smoking?

If you have not yet quit smoking, or if you did quit, but have returned to smoking, please review Booklet 1, “An Overview.” Re-read the section, “Getting Ready to Quit,” and choose a new quit date. Don’t be discouraged – you **can** do it!

Exercises

Try to think ahead about the **triggers** (people, places, things or moods) that might cause you to have urges to smoke. How many can you list? Write down what might cause you to have an urge to smoke.

✓ _____
 ✓ _____
 ✓ _____

List 5 **behavioral coping skills**. These are actions that you can do when you have an urge to smoke.


✓ _____
 ✓ _____
 ✓ _____

Now list 5 **mental coping skills**. These are things that you can tell yourself when you have an urge to smoke.

✓ _____
 ✓ _____
 ✓ _____

It is a good idea to read these lists often. Add items or make changes. It will help keep you prepared to fight urges to smoke.


Remember...



Think Ahead



Prepare



Cope


To get you through even the worst urges to smoke.

The Most Important Messages

Urges for cigarettes are common when quitting smoking, especially in the first week or so. There are steps that you can take to reduce urges or cope with them without smoking. Save this booklet and refer to it often in the first weeks. You may also want to review it every now and again in the coming months.

<p>1</p> <p>Identify your withdrawal and habit triggers.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Think ahead about when you might encounter these trigger situations.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Prepare for the urge. Avoid the situation if you can.</p>
<p>4</p> <p>If you can't avoid, cope with the urge using behavioral and mental coping skills.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Use a quit smoking medication if possible.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Remember, withdrawal urges will go away within 2 weeks IF you don't smoke.</p>

STOP SMOKING FOR GOOD



Development of this booklet was supported by grants from the:

- American Cancer Society (PBR-94)
- National Institutes of Health (R01CA80706; R01CA134347; R01DA037961)

Produced by the Tobacco Research and Intervention Program at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute

Director: Thomas H. Brandon, Ph.D.
1(877) 954-2548 | projectEASE@moffitt.org

©H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute

RL – 6

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