

Seven Common Myths about Stopping Smoking

There are many urban myths around about the difficulties involved in stopping smoking that contribute to the anxiety and subsequent delay in seeking help to quit. The problem is further exacerbated by a poor understanding of the real basis of the addiction and the frenzied marketing of inappropriate tools to help the smoker stop. Smoking and Stop Smoking are two multi-billion industries that benefit from hyping the difficulty of quitting.

Here we discuss some of the most common myths and misunderstandings and offer a more useful in depth understanding of the problem and suggest a direction for a successful solution.

Myth 1: Nicotine is Highly Addictive

Nicotine is a mildly addictive substance, and any withdrawal symptoms are nothing more than a mild anxiety that lasts for about four days. If nicotine was highly addictive, non-smoking family members of smokers would also suffer strong withdrawal symptoms. They too inhale enough nicotine passively to have an addictive effect, yet they are rarely aware of any withdrawal symptoms when they move to a non-smoking environment.

This is because they have no emotional association to smoking. Similarly people who work in smoky places have levels of nicotine in their blood high enough to cause an addiction, but they don't need to smoke when they get home, because they have no mental association with smoking relieving the mild nicotine-induced symptoms.

The symptoms often referred to as nicotine withdrawal symptoms are associated with levels of anxiety and fear that the addictive behaviour is used to cover. When the cover is removed the underlying anxiety is exposed. The smoking has been masking the underlying anxiety.

Myth 2: Habits are Hard to Break

If you walked your dog every day along the same route, you might call it a habit. Perhaps one day the road is closed, as they are demolishing a house down the street. Do you find it difficult to walk a different route or do you keep going the same way despite the life threatening danger to both you and your dog? After all it *is* habit. Most people would just turn another way and carry on with their walk, without much lingering annoyance or concern. In a short time a new habit would form of taking their new route.

Similarly habit may make you reach for a cigarette with your coffee in the morning, but that is all it is, just habit. If you have stopped and no longer want a cigarette, it doesn't cross your minds to force one upon yourself.

Habits are there to make life easier. They allow your mind to focus on what's important or new without becoming cluttered and confused. If a routine has no emotional charge then it is easily changed. It is only the emotional charge associated with a habit that keeps us from letting it go, no matter what the habit. Once the reasons the habit was formed are removed then there is no reason to continue it any longer and the habit will fade and be easily replaced at will.

Myth 3: Nicotine Withdrawal is Usually Long and Painful

The 'withdrawal symptoms' you experience when you try to give up smoking are exactly the same physical and emotional symptoms as fear and anxiety: sweating, restlessness, irritability, insomnia and nervousness. They are the same symptoms because they are the same problem. It is simply another smoking lie that being smoke free needs to be mentally and physically painful. True nicotine withdrawal is simply a mild anxiety; the rest is an exaggeration by the smokers mind, fuelled by urban myth.

This artificial anxiety induced by smoking, will last only 4 days if left to its own devices and if it is not re-triggered by smoking another cigarette. The reason people start again after quitting, is the subconscious memory that smoking once seemed to relieve anxiety, an illusion created by smoking in

the first place. Any longer lasting symptoms of anxiety and fear are unrelated to the actual nicotine withdrawal, and are based on the underlying mental and emotional associations, which no amount of nicotine can alter.

Myth 5: Smoking Isn't as Harmful as the Media Makes Out

The Facts:

Your baby – 40% more likely than non smokers' babies to be stillborn and about 20% more likely to die in the first month after birth; 50% greater risk of low birth weight, double SID deaths

Your preschooler – 50-100% increase in respiratory infections, asthma & glue ear; 17% greater risk of mental retardation

Your school age child – 40% less likely to start smoking if parents don't

Their future - about 17 percent of lung cancer cases in non-smokers could be attributed to exposure to second hand smoke as children. An estimated 3,000 lung cancer deaths and 35,000 coronary heart disease deaths occur annually among adult non-smokers in the United States as a result of exposure to second hand smoke.

Your health – Smoking kills more people than alcohol, drug abuse, homicide, suicide, car accidents, fires and AIDS combined - Every eight seconds, someone dies from tobacco use.

Financial cost – at one 20 pack a day costing 8 euro, in 1 year you pay 2,920 euro, or 14,600 euro in 5 years. Think what you could do with that money! Add to this lost productivity and earnings at work (for you and partner and other affected family members) due to smoking related illnesses and associated medical costs and your end bill is much steeper.

Medical costs - In the US, direct medical costs are about \$16 BILLION per annum, with an additional \$37 billion in indirect costs related to death, disability, and premature death.

Accidents – smoking while driving increases your risk of auto accidents

House fires - Smoking is the major cause of fires throughout Europe and the United States. One-third of all apartment and hotel fires are caused by smoking and 17 percent of house fires are caused by smoking, resulting in 4,000 injuries and 1,500 deaths each year.

While there are a small percentage people who smoke for many years and live a long and relatively healthy life, the vast majority do experience negative consequences both to themselves, to their family, socially, economically and environmentally. The odds are heavily stacked against you and your loved ones escaping undamaged – it's like playing Russian roulette with your family only there are five bullets in the six chambers instead of only one.

You've got to ask – is this a risk I'm willing to take with my life? Is this a risk I'm willing to take with my family's life?

If you know for certain there was a 80% chance you would have a life threatening accident if you drove your car today, would you get in that car with your family and drive away if there was no pressing need? That is the level of risk you take when you choose to smoke. It might not happen today, but it will happen to someone you know, and probably someone you are close to.

Myth 4: I Need to Smoke to Relax

The nicotine trick is the illusion that smoking causes relaxation, when in fact it is only relieving (temporarily) the effects of the stress caused by the previous cigarette.

Nicotine is a powerful stimulant. Once it has entered your blood-stream it has an almost immediate effect. One of its side-effects (usually noticed within 30-90 minutes) is a pharmacologically induced sense of fear, which is experienced for up to 4 days. Under normal circumstances this artificial fear can only be reduced either by another cigarette, or by allowing the nicotine to leave the body. **It is only this feeling of anxiety caused by the nicotine that is being reduced, not any real anxiety.**

Because of the time delay in the anxiety effects of the nicotine on the body your mind makes the mistake of believing the stress is real. It also makes the mistake that the subsequent cigarette is what removes the stress.

If it were necessary to smoke to relieve anxiety then how does the rest of the non-smoking world manage? Are they more stressed than the smokers?

Myth 6: I'll Put on Weight if I Stop Smoking

There is NO need to gain any weight when you stop smoking. If you stop smoking without dealing to the root causes of your addictive behaviour, there is a great risk you will just transfer from one addictive substance to another. This is why some people gain weight after stopping smoking. By changing your underlying beliefs and thoughts, you are not longer in the addictive cycle and are free to enjoy a healthier life.

People only eat more if they quit with and don't deal with the root cause of their addiction. Stopping with inappropriate support often results in an increase in anxiety levels, and people reach for an alternative pacifier. Food like smoking begins to be used as a treat, an emotional safety blanket or as a time filler. If you feel incomplete within yourself or unhappy with yourself you are far more likely to smoke or over-eat. By dealing with your loneliness, anxiety and deprivation directly there is no reason for your mind to try and substitute smoking with food.

Myth 7: I've Failed So Often in the Past I'm Bound to Fail Again Now Most smoking programs rely on the use of willpower, nicotine replacement gums or patches, or a combination of these. If you have failed using these techniques it is not a personal failure on your part but a failure of strategy. If it's Monday in London and you want to get to Hong Kong by Wednesday, walking or swimming or even a bus is unlikely to be effective. You need to use the right strategy to get to your destination.

These strategies alone or in combination rarely have a permanent result without resulting in subsequent addiction to another substance and can create considerable mental and emotional strain.

Going cold turkey and using will power does not usually work as a long term strategy. 90% of your thoughts are subconscious and 90% are the same thoughts you had yesterday. So no matter how hard you try to think you way out of smoking there is a huge amount of thoughts and feelings you don't have any conscious control over.

These thoughts like dragging a dead weight up a steep hill behind you. Eventually you become tired and the weight drags you back down again. Using will power is in effect setting up an internal civil war where you are always the loser.

Nicotine replacement does not work as nicotine is not the thing you are primarily addicted to. Nicotine is only mildly addictive and the withdrawal symptoms wear off over about 4 days. So using nicotine replacement is only useful to the companies that manufacture these products. If this were really the case you would only need to cut down one cigarette a day until you no longer smoked. In many cases of light smokers they actually increase the level of nicotine in their body by using patches.

Simple standardised hypnotic suggestion alone does not work very often as a long term strategy. Hypnotic suggestions adds a new layer of unconscious thought patterns down in the mind, but does not by itself eliminate the underlying root caused of the addictive behaviour. Hypnosis alone is not so effective as a stand alone technique.

Hypnotherapy, in contrast, works with the subconscious mind to find and remove the underlying root cause, and also works with the client's conscious mind to provide alternative healthy habits in place of smoking. It's a much more successful strategy to first remove the emotional charge keeping the smoking habit in place, then to re-programme the mind to accept a healthy replacement habit. Trying to simply eliminate the habit will leave a vacuum and symptom substitution is likely – gaining weight, biting nails etc.

What does work?

Only a technique that deals with the root causes of your addictive behaviour will be completely successful in helping you give up smoking easily permanently. A program has to have these elements to help even the most serious long term smoker quit:

- Willing participation by smoker
- Respectful honest attitude to smoking
- Intellectual understanding of the lies and myths about smoking
- Symptom relief during nicotine withdrawal
- Built in stress relief techniques
- Systematic exploration of emotional associations to smoking
- A simple appropriate technique to permanently change thoughts, feelings and beliefs that hold the smoking addiction in place changing the subconscious programming.

All these elements are supplied by the Institute of Clinical Hypnotherapy and Psychotherapy Stop Smoking Programme. Hypnotherapy uncovers and removes the root cause of the smoking habit, cognitive behavioural and neurolinguistic programming are used to re-programme thoughts and behaviours, and hypnosis is used to communicate with the subconscious mind where all our habits and behaviours are stored. A winning combination!

This combination of elements allows you to approach the change process comfortably and deal with all the various aspects of this addiction until you are ready to quit without strain.

There are different programmes depending on the level of emotional charge associated with the smoking habit. Your ICHP trained hypnotherapist will be able to advise you on the best programme for you to become successfully and permanently smoke free. Either a 2 session or 4 session approach is usually indicated.

Perhaps the biggest myth amongst smokers is 'I'll stop tomorrow'. As Henry Wight once said:
'If you are ultimately going to do something important that will make a real difference... do it NOW'
Wishing you every success.

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