

Staying Tobacco-Free After You Quit

Dealing with withdrawal

Withdrawal from nicotine has 2 parts – the physical and the mental. The physical symptoms are annoying but not life-threatening. Still, if you're not ready to resist them, they can tempt you to go back to smoking or chewing. Nicotine replacement and other medicines can help reduce many of these symptoms. Most people who use tobacco find that the mental part of quitting is the bigger challenge.

Rationalizations are sneaky

One way to overcome urges or cravings is to notice and identify *rationalizations* as they come up. A rationalization is a mistaken thought that seems to make sense at the time, but isn't based on reality. If you choose to believe in such a thought even for a short time, it can serve as a way to justify using tobacco. If you've tried to quit before, you might recognize many of these common rationalizations:

- "I'll just do it once to get through this rough spot."
- "Today isn't a good day. I'll quit tomorrow."
- "It's my only vice."
- "How bad is smoking/chewing, really? Uncle Harry smoked/chewed all his life and he lived to be over 90."
- "Air pollution is probably just as bad."
- "You've got to die of something."
- "Life is no fun without tobacco."

Use these ideas to help you stay committed to quitting

- **Avoid temptation.** Stay away from people and places that tempt you to smoke/chew. Later on you'll be able to handle these with more confidence.
- **Change your habits.** Switch to juices or water instead of alcohol or coffee. Choose foods that don't make you want to smoke/chew. Take a different route to work. Take a brisk walk instead of a tobacco break.
- **Choose other things for your mouth:** Use substitutes you can put in your mouth like sugarless gum or hard candy, raw vegetables such as carrot sticks, or sunflower seeds. Some people chew on a coffee stirrer or a straw.

- **Get active:** Do something to reduce your stress. Exercise or do something that keeps your hands busy, such as needlework or woodworking, which can help distract you from the urge to use tobacco. Clean out a closet, vacuum the floors, go for a walk, or work in the yard.
- **Breathe deeply:** When you were smoking, you breathed deeply as you inhaled the smoke. When the urge strikes now, breathe deeply and picture your lungs filling with fresh, clean air. Remind yourself of your reasons for quitting and the benefits you'll gain as an ex-smoker. Deep breathing may help you also remember that you're cleaning the toxins from smokeless tobacco out of your body.
- **Delay:** If you feel that you're about to light up, hold off. Tell yourself you must wait at least 10 minutes. Often this simple trick will allow you to move beyond the strong urge to smoke. This works for smokeless tobacco too, wait 10 minutes until the urge lessens.
- **Reward yourself.** What you're doing isn't easy, and you deserve a reward. Put the money you would have spent on cigarettes or tobacco in a jar every day and then buy yourself a weekly treat. Buy a book or some new music, go out to eat, start a new hobby, or join a gym. Or save the money for a major purchase.

You can also reward yourself in ways that don't cost money: Visit a park or go to the library. Check local news listings for museums, community centers, and colleges that have free classes, exhibits, films, and other things to do.

Staying tobacco-free

- Remember your reasons for quitting and think of all the benefits to your health, your finances, and your family.
- Ask your tobacco-using friends for support. Tell them to NOT share their cigarettes or tobacco with you – no matter what!
- Remind yourself that there is no such thing as just one dip or one cigarette – or even just one puff.
- Ride out the desire to smoke or chew. It will go away, but don't fool yourself into thinking you can have just one.
- Avoid alcohol. Drinking lowers your chance of success.
- If you're worried about weight gain, put some energy into planning a healthy diet and finding ways to exercise and stay active.
- Keep getting the counseling and support that's helped you so far.

Adapted from American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org