

First Few Days – Participant

Participant’s Objective: *To master the first few days off cigarettes.*

Withdrawal Symptoms

Most, but not all smokers, experience some degree of withdrawal symptoms after quitting. Withdrawal is caused by the nicotine addiction that was described in a previous. **The most important thing to remember about withdrawal is that it will not last long.** Withdrawal symptoms are most common in the first two weeks after quitting and are largely gone within a month. Considering the number of years you spent smoking and the benefits you will gain by quitting, this is a very short period of time. Withdrawal symptoms are a sign that your body is repairing itself after many years of smoking and is now returning to good health.

People who quit smoking can have very different experiences with withdrawal. Some smokers feel no withdrawal symptoms whatsoever. Many others report that withdrawal symptoms were much less of a problem than they anticipated. Think about the following common withdrawal symptoms.

The most familiar symptom is craving - an intense desire for cigarettes. You have likely experienced a craving before, such as when in a place where smoking is not allowed. Cravings come and go. Most do not last long. To cope with cravings, learn and practice the Four D’s.

- **Deep** Breaths: inhaling and exhaling, slowly to relax.
- **Drink** Plenty of Water - throughout the day, and especially during a craving.
- **Do** Something Else - get your mind off the craving by doing something else, preferably something active. Do a ceremony for yourself, sing, dance, pray, chew on a carrot or Native root.
- **Delay** - and the urge for the cigarette will pass.

Cravings usually last only 2-3 minutes, so you should do anything to get through them... Walk. Drink a glass of water, chew a piece of gum — anything to avoid smoking!

A second familiar symptom is tension. This will be discussed in the next section.

You may also feel lightheaded or dizzy when you first stop smoking. You may find it difficult to concentrate. These withdrawal symptoms are caused by the increased supply of oxygen to your brain now that the carbon dioxide is gone. These feelings should pass naturally within a week or two, but if you have any concerns about symptoms please contact your health care provider.

Some former smokers feel irritable, anxious or restless during the first week or two after quitting. Stay busy to distract yourself. These moods will not last long. Some may have difficulty sleeping or will feel tired during the day. These too will quickly pass. You may find that **you cough more after** you stop smoking. Increased coughing is actually a good sign. The tiny hairs that clean your lungs were paralyzed when you were smoking. Now, they are working overtime, cleaning your lungs of the tars they accumulated during your years of smoking. When your lungs are clean again, your cough will leave for good. This may take several weeks from the time you stop smoking.

Especially in the first two weeks after you quit; try to avoid people, places, and circumstances that may trigger your urge to smoke. For example, if you typically smoke while watching TV at night, plan to go out or be busy doing something else as many nights as possible. If you smoke during coffee breaks at work, plan to take a walk outside with a friend instead. If you smoke while driving, take a bottle of water with you instead.

Stress Management

Like it or not, stress is a fact of life for almost everybody. Learning to manage stress can help reduce its impact and make our lives easier. Stopping smoking is at least mildly stressful for most smokers. It requires concentration to remember not to smoke and it can be stressful to have to resist multiple temptations. In addition, some smokers experience tension, nervousness, or anxiety as a withdrawal symptom.

You can learn to manage the symptoms of stress, to relax your body through “relaxation exercises” and through other means. Some relaxation exercises are given below.

Deep-Breathing Exercise

Sit or stand. Place your feet apart comfortably. Now, close your eyes and let your head bend forward. Drop your head further now, and slowly inhale through your nose to the count of 4. Draw your breath deeply into your abdomen and raise your head slowly as you inhale. Hold your breath gently to the count of 4 and exhale slowly to the count of 6. Breathe out through your mouth. Take your time now and repeat this breathing exercise slowly at a comfortable pace. Stop for a few moments if you get dizzy. Take your time and when you feel ready to stop, slowly open your eyes. It is a good idea to play relaxing music during this exercise. Work toward increasing your lung capacity by reaching the count of 6 while inhaling, 6 holding your breath, and exhaling to the count of 8.

Other Relaxation Techniques

There are countless other ways to relax. Different things work for different people. Perhaps you find a warm bath or listening to relaxing music. Or you may relax by doing activities such as walking or dancing. Some people like to pray or do a ceremony for themselves in a pleasant place. Give some thought to what is relaxing for you.

Assertiveness

In addition to managing the symptoms of stress through relaxation exercises, you can benefit by learning to better manage the actual sources of stress in your life. This is important because some smokers use cigarettes as a way to avoid dealing with stress. Be prepared to receive assistance from other health care providers.

Being assertive is one way to deal with stress and stressful situations. Being assertive means being able to express what you think and feel in a calm and dignified way. Passive people do not feel able to express their feelings. Aggressive people, on the other hand, express their thoughts and feelings in a way aimed at controlling, dominating, or hurting others. Your goal, whenever possible, should be to be assertive, rather than either passive or aggressive.

Consider some of the ways in which you can become more assertive.

- Speak with short, direct sentences.
- Use phrases such as “I think”, “I believe,” and “in my opinion” to show that you assume responsibility for your thoughts.
- Ask others to clarify what they’re saying when you aren’t certain you understand them.
- Describe events objectively, rather than exaggerating, distorting, or lying.
- Provide culturally appropriate body language to show respect.

Becoming more assertive will benefit you in many ways. You will be able to express anger more directly and easily. This is important because many new former smokers find that they are aware of increased anger. Remember, being assertive means being neither passive nor aggressive. Also, being assertive means being able to express what you are thinking or feeling. It does not mean that you have to express those thoughts and feelings. Assertive adults do not always choose to say what’s on their minds-but they are always able to do so.

How will you confront stress throughout your day?
What traditional activities might you do to relieve stress?
How will you fight cravings?