

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

“You said it would get better. It's just as bad as the day I quit smoking!”

Recently I was met with this warm greeting from a clinic participant on his eighth day without smoking. As you may recall, we explain during the clinic that if a smoker can get through the first three days without smoking, the physiological withdrawal will start to diminish, and within two weeks all physiological withdrawal will stop.

While we can accurately predict the physiological withdrawal, psychological withdrawals can occur at anytime. It is possible that the urge this man was having was just as painful as the ones he had a week earlier. While the urge may have been as strong, it was different. When he had an urge before, there was really nothing he could do to get over it. If he just held out a few minutes, the urge would pass. But psychological urges are more under the ex-smoker's conscious control. A good analogy demonstrating the difference between physiological and psychological pain can be seen by analyzing a common toothache.

A rotting tooth can cause a lot of pain. If your dentist explains to you why the tooth hurts it really doesn't resolve the situation. You know why it hurts, but it still hurts. Simply understanding physical pain does not make the pain go away.

To illustrate another point, say you go to the dentist and find out that you have a cavity. He has to drill the tooth and put in a filling. The drilling can be a very rough experience. After it is all over the pain will stop, but whenever you hear the sound of a dentist's drill, even if it's years later, you cringe at the thought of the pain. Once you realize that you are simply reacting to the sound, you know that you are not really in danger and the reaction will end. Understanding the root of the fear alleviates the anxiety and the associated pain.

Any urges for cigarettes that occur today are reactions to conditioned triggers. You are doing or experiencing something for the first time without smoking. It may be

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going to a bar, a wedding or going on a plane. It may be seeing a person or being in a place where you always had a cigarette in the past. It may be something you hear or even an old familiar aroma. The sense of smell is a powerful mechanism for triggering old emotional feelings.

So today, if you find yourself desiring a cigarette, look around you and see why at this particular time and place a cigarette is on your mind. Once you understand that the desire is being triggered by some reaction to an insignificant event, you can just say "no" to the cigarette without further problem. All you need to do is understand what triggered the thought. The urge will pass. The next time you encounter a similar situation you will not even think of a cigarette. You will have learned how to face another experience as an ex-smoker.

Quitting smoking is a learning experience. Every time you overcome an urge you will have overcome another obstacle that threatened your status as an ex-smoker. As time goes by, you will run out of obstacles and you can comfortably go through life a happier and healthier person. All you need to remember and practice to stay an ex-smoker is - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF.

Joel

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