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A 10-Minute Consult: How to quit smoking

Preparing to quit

Don't kid yourself by trying to cut down; nearly everyone who tries slides back up to his or her usual dose of nicotine. That's not to say quitting doesn't take preparation — it does. Here are some steps to take in the days and weeks before you quit:

- Make a list of reasons to quit and another list of people who have kicked the habit. The first list will remind you why quitting is important, and the second will show you that folks who are no stronger or smarter than you have succeeded. After you quit, keep your lists handy and refer to them whenever you begin to waver.

- Pick a quit date and stick to it. You might plan to quit on a special day, such as a birthday or the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout event on the third Thursday of each November. Steer clear of stressful periods, and avoid holidays if you are likely to be invited to smoke-filled parties.

- Tell your friends and family about your plan and your quit date. That way, they can hold you accountable.
- Try to get other smokers in your household or circle of friends to join you in quitting. A 2008 study found that smoking behavior spreads through both close and distant social ties; your resolve and success can help your friends and, ultimately, your community.
- As your quit date approaches, throw out your ashtrays, clean your house, car, and clothes, and clean your teeth. Once you're away from it, you'll see that smoking stinks.
- Make your house a no-smoking zone. According to a 2007 study, people who were not allowed to smoke in the house were more likely to quit than those who could.
- Anticipate withdrawal symptoms such as grumpiness, restlessness, irritability, hunger, headache, anxiety, and drowsiness or insomnia. To get through the rough patches, stock up on low-calorie snacks and sugarless gum or candy to keep your mouth busy. Plan enjoyable diversions to keep your mind occupied, and think of ways to keep your hands busy.
- Before quitting, identify some activities that make you feel good, healthy, and energetic and plan to engage in them during the first few weeks after quitting. You will need to be distracted and rewarded during this time.

One ex-smoker's story

Like many smokers, Mark Remus* started when he was a teenager, because some of his friends were trying it and it "seemed cool." Ten years — and about 10 attempts to quit — later, he finally kicked the habit at age 26. On attempts one through nine, he usually went smoke-free for a week or two — once he lasted a whole five months — but he eventually started smoking again.

Remus, who has been a nonsmoker for eight years now, said that the final time, he really wanted to quit — that was the only difference between going back to cigarettes and staying away from them for good. Before, while he realized that he *should* quit, he didn't actually *want* to. "This last time, I truly felt like the time was here to knock the bad habit out of my life," he said.

For his final attempt, he briefly used a stop-smoking aid, nicotine gum, but for the most part, he went cold turkey. He doesn't remember doing anything specific to deal with the cravings; he said he just lived with them until they passed.

Now, the only time he even thinks about smoking cigarettes is when he's around other people who smoke. "But I know I quit for a reason and after eight years, what would be the point of going back? Plus it is an expensive, dirty habit, and it just wouldn't fit into my current lifestyle. I wouldn't smoke in my house, I wouldn't like my suits smelling like smoke for work, and I am budget-minded

and wouldn't want to spend money on cigarettes.”

He said that he also feels some societal pressure to remain a nonsmoker: “People look at smokers and judge them for making such a bad choice. Smokers are sometimes deemed stupid, low class, careless, or dirty. I don't want people to think of me like that.”

His advice for others who want to quit is basic: “You will never quit unless you want to. All the games we play to quit — such as smoking your brains out the day before you plan to quit, etc. — are reasons to put off really doing it. If you are ready, you will simply not light another up.”

**Not his real name*

For more information on Smoking and Tobacco Cessation, please visit the Healthy Living Section on our website at <http://www.simplywell.com>.

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