

New York State Smokers' Quitline

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HOW TO:

DEAL WITH STRESS AS A NON-SMOKER



If you used cigarettes to help you deal with stress or negative moods, normal stressful situations that come up after you quit may give you the urge to smoke. Fortunately, non-smokers and former smokers have found many ways to deal with their stress or negative moods (boredom, anger, sadness, anxiety) without lighting a cigarette. You can, too!

Why does this happen?

- ▶ Mental or physical tensions, strains, or distress caused by worries, responsibilities, and hassles which you encounter in normal everyday life, can all be a part of stress and can cause negative moods. Happy occasions like moving to a new home or getting married can also cause stress.
- ▶ When nicotine enters your brain, it appears to activate many powerful chemical reactions in the brain.
- ▶ These chemicals regulate mood, alertness, learning, memory, pleasure, anxiety and pain.
- ▶ When you smoke, the nicotine changes these chemicals. You may feel increased pleasure, less anxiety and more relaxed.

How common is this?

- ▶ Over years of smoking, your brain has been trained into thinking that smoking is relaxing, because without nicotine you begin to feel nervous and anxious. This learning process becomes so ingrained into your mind that it takes time to learn how to cope with stress without smoking a cigarette.
- ▶ This is why stress levels tend to be highest during the first two weeks after quitting, and then taper off.
- ▶ During the first few weeks of quitting, even small stresses can lead to powerful urges to smoke.
- ▶ As time goes by the urges get weaker.

What can you do about it?

- ▶ Know what stresses or negative moods give you the urge to smoke. Try to think of other ways you can cope with them. (i.e. read, take a walk, talk with a friend)
- ▶ Know the cause of stress in your life (i.e. job, children, money).
- ▶ Know your stress signals (headaches, nervousness, or trouble sleeping).
- ▶ Create peaceful times in your everyday schedule. Set aside some time where you can get away from other people and your usual environment.
- ▶ Practice and picture yourself putting your relaxation plans to work. Put your plan into action. Change your plan as needed.
- ▶ Learn relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga or deep breathing.

H O W T O D E A L W I T H S T R E S S**During the first few weeks as a non-smoker**

- ▶ Plan for the following typically stressful situations.
 - A bad day at work
 - A problem with your kids
 - An argument with your spouse or partner
 - A traffic ticket
 - A minor fender-bender

After several weeks as a non-smoker

- ▶ Plan for the following more highly stressful situations.
 - The death of a loved one
 - The loss of a job (self or loved one)
 - A serious illness or injury (self or loved one)
 - A major family crisis

Use Behavioral Coping Skills

- ▶ Behavioral coping skills are things that you do and involve you taking some form of action. Examples are:
 - Leave the situation
 - Call a friend
 - Take deep breaths
 - Go for a walk
 - Exercise
 - Chew gum

Use Mental Coping Skills

- ▶ Mental coping skills are things that you “tell yourself” to keep yourself from smoking. Examples are:
 - Remind yourself of the reasons you quit smoking.
 - Say *“I can deal with this without smoking. No matter what happens today, smoking is not an option for me.”*
 - Remind yourself that smoking will not solve the problem.
 - Remember how much you have accomplished so far. Tell yourself that you are not going to let all your efforts go to waste.

Take a one-minute vacation

- ▶ The one-minute vacation is something you can do almost anywhere by following these steps:
 - 1) Close your eyes.
 - 2) Take a deep, slow breath through your nose. As you inhale, picture yourself in a favorite spot.
 - 3) Exhale slowly through your mouth, holding that scene in your mind.
 - 4) Enjoy the pleasure of that scene.
 - 5) Open your eyes and feel refreshed.

R E M E M B E R T H E 5 D ' S**D**elay**D**rink Water**D**o Something Else**D**eep Breathe**D**iscuss With A Friend