

## Nicotine Relapse Prevention

The key to living as a nonsmoker is for you to keep your guard up. Even though you have committed not to smoke, you will still be tempted.

Most relapses occur in the first week after quitting, when withdrawal symptoms are strongest and the body is still dependent on the nicotine. During the first few weeks, the urge to smoke often hits at predictable times. Train yourself to anticipate those times and find ways to cope without smoking. Most of the other relapses take place within the first three months after quitting, with situational triggers that occur unexpectedly, such as particularly stressful events. This is the kind of situation that is difficult to prepare for until it happens, so it is especially important to teach yourself to recognize it when and if it does happen.

If you did not succeed on your first try, you are not alone; over 90 percent of first attempts fail. Most smokers make an average of four to seven attempts before becoming a long-term nonsmoker. Relapse is common and should be viewed as part of the quitting process.

### Tips to Fight the Urge to Smoke

Think about why you quit. You can even make a list of reasons for quitting and look at it when you have the urge to smoke.

These tips are designed for you, the new nonsmoker, to help you nurture the nonsmoking habit:

- **Know when you are rationalizing.** Do not talk yourself into thinking that just one cigarette will not hurt. Research indicates that if you have even one cigarette, there is a 90 percent chance you will return to regular smoking.
- **Anticipate triggers and prepare to avoid them.** By now, you know what triggers are likely to tempt you to smoke. Be prepared so you will be able to counteract them. Use the skills that helped you quit.
- **Reward yourself for not smoking in some way.** This will help remind yourself that what you are doing is important.
- **Use positive thoughts.** Negative thinking can decrease motivation. Positive self-talk can help you find solutions to barriers, feel good about yourself and take action. Trying to hold out through willpower alone is never effective.
- **Use relaxation techniques.** Deep breathing exercises help to reduce tension. Instead of smoking a cigarette, take a long, deep breath, count to ten, release it and then repeat it.
- **Get social support.** Seek out the listening support of someone who listens to your triumphs and troubles without judging you. They will be able to help you resist the urge to smoke.

### Coping with Relapse

Recognize the relapse as a setback that does not mean that you are a smoker again. A relapse does not mean that you are a failure or cannot be a nonsmoker. It is important to get yourself back on track immediately and use the coping skills described above. Those individuals who know at least one coping skill are more likely to remain nonsmokers than those who do not. Use the setback as a learning experience.

Recognize that you were successful for several days, weeks or even months, without a cigarette. This shows that you can be a successful nonsmoker and do not need cigarettes.

## Resources

- American Cancer Society: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

## Here when you need us.

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