

Up in Smoke

Smoke Stats. If you smoke and want to kick the habit, you are not alone. Two out of ten adults age 25-44 years old in the US smoke. Over 40 million men and women smoke in the U.S., and worldwide figures top 1.5 billion.¹ That figure does not include marijuana, which is rapidly trending up in the U.S. Most smokers began using tobacco before the age of 18. Tobacco addiction is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States killing 480,000 each year which is equal to four 747 airplane crashes a day.

Smoking is a major cause of cancer, heart disease, stroke, and lung diseases. Seventy percent of smokers interviewed say they would like to kick the habit, and if you are one of them, we have good news: you can do it!

Why do so many people smoke? Tobacco elevates stress hormones and dopamine, which work together to increase energy and produce a quick “lift.”² Nicotine is highly addictive and quickly changes the brain by altering neurotransmitter function, especially dopamine.

Dopamine is linked to feelings of joy and happiness as well as learning and motivation. When nicotine is stopped, it leaves the system within 30 hours of the last dose. But dopamine circuitry is altered due to addiction, so normal activities don’t kindle the same pleasant feelings. Since brain chemistry takes time to return to normal, relapse can occur.

An aggressive “recovery lifestyle” stimulates dopamine and promotes healing while reducing the risk of relapse. Thousands of people quit smoking every day. The following **7 “R”s for a Recovery Lifestyle** can help you kick the tobacco habit for good!

1. Real Food. Plant foods lower stress, cut cravings for sugar and stimulants (like tobacco and caffeine), and improve mental function and mood. Enjoy plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, and seeds. Avoid junk food, saturated animal fat and trans-fats, caffeine, and large amounts of refined sugar. When you eat better, you will feel better and have the energy to make better choices.

2. Regular Exercise. Exercise increases dopamine and other neurotransmitters associated with motivation, reward, learning, and behavior.³ Exercise also reduces withdrawal symptoms and the desire to smoke.⁴ Exercise lowers stress, depression, and anxiety; it improves mood, well-being, and mental processing; it also increases learning power.

3. Rest. Regular sleep restores the brain. It helps control stress hormones and blood sugar, and reduces irritability, fatigue, and stress. Taking time for mental and physical rest is a major weapon against relapse. Refreshing sleep and periods of relaxation increase energy. Deep breathing exercises calm the body and mind in the middle of a stressful day. Your brain solidifies the new habits and routines during deep sleep.

4. Regularity. Establish regular hours for meals, exercise, and rest for healing and energizing your brain and body. Start your day with a refreshing glass of water. Eat fresh fruits, some nuts, and a whole grain cereal for breakfast. Take a brisk ten minute walk after each meal to help curb tobacco cravings. Rearrange your physical environment to reflect your new choices. Throw away the “smoking jacket” and keep your gym bag in plain view. Drink water between meals, and enjoy a lunch that is rich in dietary fiber such as beans, leafy green salads, and fresh vegetables. Keep supper light.

5. Relationships. We are wired for relationships. We all need relationships because we are made in the image of a loving God, who calls us to a healing relationship with Him and each other. Addictions create a false relationship with the addiction. They create isolation and despair. Building healthy relationships helps ease depression linked to addiction; creates opportunities for giving and receiving and provides support and accountability.

6. Response-ability. Owning your decisions makes learning new habits possible. Practicing new attitudes and actions takes time and perseverance, but yields great benefits. God will give you the power to change. **“If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36.** He is reaching out to you by His Spirit and through His Word, and through others who love and care for you.

Practicing new thinking, new choices, and new habits involves daily decisions.

7. Renewal. Spiritual health is at the center of a healthy lifestyle. God will renew your heart, change your desires and give you power and wisdom for life’s challenging journey. Through Bible study, prayer, and practicing the principles of life taught by the Bible, peace, forgiveness, endurance, and victory are possible. **“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Matthew 19:26.**

Practice on Purpose! You may feel that you have lost the power to choose what you know is right. Many people have overcome addictions, mastered new skills, learned to enjoy new activities, hobbies, foods, and friends—and you can too! How? By practicing the 7 “R”s.

But like practicing a new instrument, some sour notes may emerge as you learn your “new song” for living. **Successful people are not mistake free—they just refuse to give up.**

The more times a positive thought or action is repeated, the more it is cemented in the brain. You will need determination, but your body and brain will respond to healthful lifestyle changes. **“And to God—thanks, to Him who is giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:57.** That is how millions have quit tobacco forever. You can be one of them!

Visit us at LifestyleMatters.com or call 1-866-624-5433 for your resources to build a better brain, body, and lifestyle.

¹ 2014 CDC Fact Sheet on Smoking.

² Effects of nicotine and caffeine, separately and in combination, on EEG topography, mood, heart rate, cortisol, and vigilance. Gilbert DG. *Psychophysiology* 2000;37(5):583-95.

³ Ratey J. *User's Guide to the Brain* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2002).

⁴ Effect of a short bout of exercise on tobacco withdrawal symptoms and desire to smoke. Ussher M, et al. *Outcomes Management* 2001;157(4):66-72.