



FOREVER
FREE™...for Baby and Me

A Guide To Remaining Smoke Free



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Booklet 3: Smoking Urges

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This is Booklet 3 in the Forever Free for Baby and Me series. The first booklet was an overview of important information about staying off of cigarettes. This booklet covers smoking urges in more detail.

What are Urges?

Urges. Cravings. Desires. These are all words that smokers and ex-smokers use to describe how they feel when they want a cigarette. To some people, each word means something a little bit different. For example, some smokers say that a "craving" is much stronger than an "urge."

However, to most people, the words mean pretty much the same thing. In this booklet, we will use all three words to mean the same thing.

Different Types of Urges

There are at least three kinds of cigarette urges that ex-smokers have:

1. nicotine withdrawal urges
2. habit urges
3. memories of smoking

1. NICOTINE WITHDRAWAL URGES

Over your years of smoking, your body got used to nicotine. Many of your organs made changes to get used to the effects of nicotine. These include your brain and your heart. These changes let you smoke without feeling all the effects of nicotine that you felt when you first started smoking. For example, after years of smoking you probably did not feel light-headed after a cigarette. Your pulse no longer raced as fast.

But, when you quit smoking your body adjusted again. This time it adjusted to *not* getting nicotine. Your brain, heart, and other organs now had to get used to you not smoking! This change can be unpleasant and is called **nicotine withdrawal**. The symptoms of nicotine withdrawal include:



- ◆ lightheadedness (feeling dizzy)
- ◆ sleep problems
- ◆ decreased heart rate
- ◆ craving for cigarettes
- ◆ increased appetite
- ◆ poor attention or concentration
- ◆ headache
- ◆ nausea (sick to your stomach)
- ◆ depression (feeling sad)
- ◆ irritability (feeling grouchy)
- ◆ anxiety (feeling tense)
- ◆ constipation

Most people do not have all of these symptoms, but they do have some. Nicotine withdrawal begins about 20 minutes after your last cigarette. If you do not smoke, it lasts between one and two weeks. There are three ways to stop these unpleasant symptoms:

1. Wait for it to end – this may take one or two weeks.

OR

2. Use nicotine replacement products such as nicotine gum or patch or use Zyban™ or Chantix™. Please note, you should talk to your doctor before using any of these products while you are pregnant.

OR

3. Smoke a cigarette.

The first two ways are, of course, how someone quits smoking. But it is very tempting to get relief the third way-by smoking a cigarette. This describes the "nicotine withdrawal urge." Smokers get this urge when the nicotine from their last cigarette clears their brain-about 20 minutes after smoking.

Why do most smokers say that their strongest craving for a cigarette is first thing in the morning?

It is because their body has been without nicotine for 8 hours while they were sleeping.

How long do ex-smokers have nicotine withdrawal urges?

Urges may occur as long as nicotine withdrawal lasts. For most people, this is about one to two weeks after quitting smoking. Often a smoker tries to quit but does not *completely* quit smoking. She may have one or two cigarettes per day to deal with urges. This "cheating" just makes nicotine withdrawal last longer. The "quick fix" can cause more problems.

What does a nicotine withdrawal urge feel like?

If you have just quit smoking, you may remember the feeling very well from your first week of quitting. Urges are hard to describe, but many ex-smokers say that this type of urge feels physical. This makes sense, since it occurs in response to physical changes in your body.

One woman told us that these urges felt like "*a stone was in my chest.*" This is a good way to describe the feeling.

2. HABIT URGES

Many women who quit smoking during their pregnancy may find that they no longer have nicotine withdrawal urges. Habit urges, on the other hand, may still be a problem for them.

Habit urges occur when an ex-smoker is in a situation that is tied to smoking for that person. Here are some examples of habit urges:

a. Mary always smoked while talking on the telephone. Whenever the phone rang, she would reach for her pack and light a cigarette. Now she has quit smoking for three weeks. But whenever she hears the telephone ring she still wants a smoke.

b. Sue liked to play cards. Playing cards and smoking used to go hand in hand for her. Then Sue found out she was pregnant. While she was pregnant and trying to quit smoking, Sue wisely avoided her bridge group. Now the baby is born. To Sue's surprise, her first night back with her group caused cravings for cigarettes. Seeing that all of her girlfriends were smoking only seemed to make it worse.



c. Jestene and her sister started smoking together as teens. Although they now live 500 miles apart, they get back together once or twice a year to visit.



Jestene values these visits she has with her sister. Since their last visit, Jestene has quit smoking for her second pregnancy. She has not smoked for five months now, and she has had very little desire to smoke. However, her sister recently came to visit for a few weeks to help with Jestene's household demands during her third trimester. When she and her sister sat down at the kitchen table and began to talk, Jestene's sister pulled out a pack and offered her a cigarette. Jestene had a strong urge to smoke. Smoking seemed like the thing to do.

d. Patty had been smoke-free during her pregnancy and for three months since giving birth, and she was proud of it. Last week, while driving her daughter to day care, she was rear-ended by another driver. She was not hurt, but her baby was bruised on her forehead. One person at the scene of the accident was smoking, and Patty felt that she too needed a cigarette to deal with the stress.

These four stories were told to us by former smokers. In each case, something from the past set off the urge to smoke. For Mary, it was the telephone. For Sue, it was playing cards. For Jestene, it was her sister. And for Patty, it was stress over her child. The things that set off these urges are called "triggers." The triggers can be people, places, things, and even moods.

Here is a list of some common triggers for habit urges:

- ◆ talking on the phone
- ◆ driving a car
- ◆ seeing cigarettes or smelling smoke
- ◆ being with someone who is smoking
(like a girlfriend, husband, or coworker)
- ◆ drinking alcohol
- ◆ having a fight with family
- ◆ feeling bored
- ◆ sitting outside
- ◆ celebrating
- ◆ feeling **STRESSED**
- ◆ trying to solve a problem
- ◆ feeling lonely
- ◆ finishing a job
- ◆ eating
- ◆ feeling angry, sad, or nervous
- ◆ returning to the workplace
- ◆ drinking coffee
- ◆ social events
(with smokers or nonsmokers)

As you can see, a lot of different things can cause habit urges. The good news is that you will not have habit urges forever. The longer you go without smoking, the fewer urges you will have.



If you have a strong urge months after quitting, it may be because you are in a situation that you had not been in since quitting. For example, after having a baby, many women return to places or activities that they enjoyed before their pregnancy. After you get through these situations *without smoking* the urges will get easier, until they go away. This process is clear from the following story told by one of our clients:

Lisa had her last cigarette when she was two months pregnant. Her boyfriend Tom supported her decision to quit. During her pregnancy, he was very careful to avoid smoking around her. Tom would go outside when he wanted a cigarette and he stopped smoking in the car. Lisa was grateful for his efforts to help her stay smoke-free. Shortly after the baby was born, Tom and Lisa took a trip to visit family. During the drive, Tom lit up a cigarette in the car. Lisa had a strong craving for a cigarette. She told herself that she did not want to start smoking again, and she made it through the drive without having a cigarette. It seemed like the longest trip of her life. However, on their next road trip together, Lisa was very surprised to find that she was not bothered by smoking urges at all!



In Lisa's case, Tom's smoking in the car was a trigger for her. The first time she was in this situation since quitting, she had strong urges. But because she did not give in to the urges, the next time she was in the car with Tom she did not have any problem with urges. In most cases urges do not go away after only one time with a trigger situation. But after many times, the urges will go away.

The other type of trigger that can cause strong urges long after quitting is **STRESS**. Most women smokers deal with stress by having a cigarette. So, after you quit smoking, it is common to want a cigarette when you are feeling stressed.

Viga had not smoked in the months since learning she was pregnant, and she rarely had any desire to smoke. However, today at work her boss told her that the company would be laying off 50% of its workers. Her supervisor did not know who would stay and who would be let go. Jobs were hard to find for a pregnant woman who was showing, and Viga was very concerned about losing her job. The first day after hearing the news, she had strong urges to smoke. She found herself thinking, "Who cares if I start smoking again? That's nothing like not having a job!" But, she did not smoke, and by the third day the urges had died down, even though she was still worried about her job.

Viga did get laid off. But even then, she did not start smoking again. Viga's story also shows how, in times of stress, people often feel that staying off cigarettes is not as important as the current problem. When a loved one dies you might feel that you need a cigarette to cope, and you do not really care if you start smoking again. However, people who start smoking because of stress may regret it once the stressful event passes. Time does help.

Jackie had been married for 5 years when she became pregnant with her son, David. Jackie and her husband Dylan both quit smoking when they learned of the pregnancy. When David was just a year old, Dylan was killed in an auto accident. Jackie was devastated. She could barely make it to work and take care of her son, and she was in danger of losing her job. She no longer cared if she got cancer or heart disease, and she started smoking again. Six months later, as she began to cope with the loss of her husband, she was sorry she had started smoking. "It was bad enough that David had lost his father," she said, "I wanted to make sure that I would be there for him. Plus, I remembered the wonderful feeling of achievement that Dylan and I shared when we quit smoking together – and I didn't want to lose that." She signed up for classes to stop smoking and was able to quit again.

It is important to note that good moods can also trigger habit urges. You may have smoked cigarettes when you were feeling good or when something good happened. When this happens after you quit, you may have urges to smoke. We know people who started smoking again when they were having a good time, like at a wedding or a birthday party.

Denisha and Brandon were so excited about the birth of their new baby! Some of their friends in the neighborhood planned a welcome home party to celebrate the new baby. By this time, Denisha had not smoked a cigarette for eight months. At the party, she felt great to be visiting with good friends that she had not seen for a long time. As she was laughing and having a good time, Denisha found herself lighting up a cigarette. When she realized what she was doing, she was surprised and she forced herself to put the cigarette out. Denisha reminded herself about how hard it was to quit and that she did not want to celebrate her new baby by going back to smoking. She wanted her baby to have good health.



Remember, habit urges occur when you are in a situation that is tied to smoking for you. The urges will get easier if you get through the situation without smoking.

3. MEMORIES OF SMOKING

You may have been a smoker for many years. You may have lived much of your life as a smoker. If you smoked a pack per day, you took about 70,000 puffs on cigarettes each year. There are few things that you have done as many times, besides breathing. Thus, you will have memories of smoking. You may see someone smoking and recall that you used to do that. Other things may trigger memories of when you were a smoker - an old song, a certain food, old friends, etc. Each ex-smoker has memories about smoking. Sometimes they come on fast. Sometimes there is an urge when a smoking memory occurs. People who quit smoking many years ago sometimes say that they still have urges to smoke. They are mostly talking about memories they have from when they were smokers.

Will Urges Change After I Have My Baby?

Some women report that urges temporarily increase after they deliver. Why is this?

1. The first few weeks after you give birth are stressful, which causes urges.
2. If you quit just for the pregnancy, you may feel like you reached your goal, and be tempted to smoke again.
3. Your hormones change, which may trigger urges.

**BUT REMEMBER, THESE URGES WILL NOT LAST LONG
IF YOU STAY OFF CIGARETTES!**

How to Deal with Urges to Smoke



There are three key ways to deal with urges without smoking:

Think ahead → *Prepare for the urge* → *Cope with the urge*

THINK AHEAD

Most recent ex-smokers know the types of situations that are hard for them. These are the kinds of situations listed on page 5. If you can plan ahead for these, you will be able to prepare for them. For example, before going to a wedding, you can tell yourself that the reception may cause urges to smoke. Or, if you have a stressful event coming up (going for baby's first shots, perhaps) you can tell yourself that you may crave a cigarette. If you used to smoke at your child's soccer games, and the first game since you quit smoking is next week, you can think ahead that you might want to smoke.

PREPARE FOR THE URGE

Thinking ahead is only part of the solution. You need to prepare for it. Think about what you will do if you do indeed have urges in a situation. Will you be able to leave the situation? Can you have some gum or a carrot stick to chew until the urge passes? What can you tell yourself in the situation that will help you get through it? For example, "I am doing this for both me and my baby." If you think of these things ahead, you will be more likely to use them when the time comes.

COPE WITH THE URGE

Coping is the real key. Coping skills are the things that you do or tell yourself in order to get your mind off cigarettes. Research shows that people who use coping skills are much more likely to stay quit than people who do not. People who rely on "willpower" tend to start smoking again. There are two types of coping skills that you can use: behavioral and mental.

Behavioral coping skills are things that you can do... actions that you take.

Here is a list:

- ◆ Leave the situation.
- ◆ Call or talk to a friend who will listen.
- ◆ Exercise (take a walk or dance).
- ◆ Take a nap or get more sleep (if baby allows).
- ◆ Take slow, deep breaths.
- ◆ Have a drink of water.
- ◆ Brush your teeth or gargle with mouthwash.
- ◆ Eat or chew on something (gum, candy, vegetables)
- ◆ Relax. Try yoga or do some stretching exercises.
- ◆ Keep your hands busy (play cards, play with a rubber band, squeeze a foam ball, write).
- ◆ Take a shower or bath.
- ◆ Do something with your child.
- ◆ Go out with a nonsmoker.
- ◆ Do something that you enjoy, like reading, writing, listening to music, or watching TV.



Mental coping skills are things that you can tell yourself. Here is a list:

- ◆ Remind yourself of the reasons you wanted to quit (your health, the baby's health, money, to smell better, etc.).
- ◆ Think of how long you've been cigarette free. You do not want to start over again.
- ◆ Think of how you got through this situation in the past without smoking ("Last time that I had an urge, I stopped and took deep breaths.")
- ◆ Try to figure out what is making you want a cigarette right now ("I am feeling stressed, I need to take a brief break.")
- ◆ Tell yourself that smoking will not solve the problem. It only creates new ones.
- ◆ Surf the urge. Imagine the urge is a wave that builds up, then breaks. Imagine that you are a surfer riding the urge wave, rather than being "wiped out" by it.
- ◆ Think of how your health is improving because you quit smoking ("I can breathe easier and have more energy.")
- ◆ Tell yourself that *smoking is not an option!*

That last mental coping skill is the all-time favorite of our smoking clients. They say that telling themselves, "Smoking is not an option," is simple and works well for them. Anything *else* may be an option, but not smoking!

You may like some of these coping skills better than others. You can come up with your own as well. That's OK. It really does not matter which skills you use, as long as you do **something** when you have an urge to smoke. Some research shows that it is best to use both behavioral and mental coping skills when you have an urge.

There is one thing you want to avoid doing when you have an urge. You *do not* want to beat yourself up. Ex-smokers who tell themselves "I am so weak," or "I was so stupid to ever smoke," tend to start smoking again. Your coping skills should be **positive**, not negative.

HELPFUL HINT:

If you ever slip and have a cigarette, you can use these coping skills to avoid smoking any more.

When Will the Urges End?

Nicotine withdrawal urges last only one or two weeks if you do not smoke. Habit urges slowly go away as you are in different situations without smoking. But, new situations or a lot of stress can still trigger urges. Most people who have quit for a year or more rarely have habit urges. You may always have memories of smoking. Some of these will be pleasant memories, but most ex-smokers do not feel strong urges to smoke while having these memories. As the box on page 8 notes, your urges may increase for a while after you give birth. BUT, they will go away again.

Summary

There are 3 main types of urges to smoke:

1. **Nicotine Withdrawal Urges** – These urges happen because your body has to adjust to not having nicotine when a person quits smoking. If you *do not smoke*, nicotine withdrawal lasts between one and two weeks for most people.
2. **Habit Urges** – These occur when an ex-smoker is in a situation in which they used to smoke, such as driving in the car. As you go through these situations without smoking the urges will get easier and go away.
3. **Memories of Smoking** – Things such as a song or a food may trigger memories of when you were a smoker and create an urge to smoke.

The best ways to deal with urges to smoke are:

1. **Think Ahead** – Try to predict when you might have an urge to smoke.
2. **Prepare For the Urge** – Think of things you can tell yourself and actions you can take to overcome the urge.
3. **Cope With the Urge** – Use behavioral and mental coping skills to fight your urges to smoke.



Exercises

I. Try to think ahead about the **triggers** (people, places, things, or moods) that might cause you to want to smoke. How many can you list? Write down what might cause you to have an urge to smoke.

✓ _____
✓ _____
✓ _____

II. List 3 **behavioral coping skills**. These are things that you can do when you have an urge to smoke.

✓ _____
✓ _____
✓ _____

III. Now list 3 **mental coping skills**. These are things that you can tell yourself when you have an urge to smoke.

✓ _____
✓ _____
✓ _____

It is a good idea to read these lists often. Add items or make changes. It helps to keep you prepared to fight urges to smoke.

Remember...

Think Ahead



Prepare



Cope

Notes:

- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
- ◆ _____
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Enjoy Better Health for You and Your Baby

Stay Smoke-Free!

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