

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Replacing Crutches

"Boy did I ever drink my brains out, today," a clinic participant enthusiastically proclaimed, "But I did not smoke!" She was so proud of her accomplishment. Two whole days without smoking a single cigarette. To her, being bombed out of her mind was a safe alternative to the deadly effects of cigarettes.

Just 24 hours earlier I had made a special point of mentioning the dangers of replacing one addiction with another. In quitting smoking one should not start using any other crutches which might be dangerous or addictive. But this was not of concern to her. She said, "I already have a drinking problem, so what more could go wrong with getting drunk to quit smoking." Twenty minutes into the program, she stood up, passed out and had to be carried out.

Quitting by crutch replacement carries varying degrees of risks. Turning to any other addictive substance, even legal or prescribed drugs, carries the risk of a new addiction. In many of these cases the end result will be a more significant problem than just the original smoking. The new addiction can cause the person's life to end in shambles, and when it comes time to deal with the new dependence he or she will often relapse to cigarettes.

Turning to food, especially high calorie sweet foods, will usually result in a psychological need with a subsequent weight gain. The risk of weight gain is insignificant in comparison to the dangers associated with cigarettes. The ex-smoker would have to gain over 75 pounds to create the equivalent health hazard of cigarette smoking. But weight gain often results in a state of panic and frustration which can lead the ex-smoker to conclude that he or she would rather be a skinny smoker than an obese ex-smoker. The fallacy which causes the ex-smoker to reach this conclusion is that only two options exist for him or her - smoke or eat more. In fact, other choices exist. One is not smoking and eating in a manner similar to when he or she was a smoker. Another is increasing activity levels to compensate for the added caloric intake when eating extra amounts.

Some people turn to a healthy alternative as a crutch, like jogging or swimming.

These activities carry low risk and, in fact, often result in physical benefits. But if they are being done as a direct crutch in maintaining abstinence, they pose one major threat. As with drugs, alcohol, or food, when the day comes that one must stop the activity, the seemingly successful ex-smoker will often relapse. Sometimes a minor ankle sprain will temporarily end a jogger's running, or an ear infection will interfere with swimming. What should be a temporary minor inconvenience ends in a tragic result - relapse to cigarettes.

Again, the ex-smoker believes that only one of two states exist for him or her - either smoking or mandatory exercise. But, in actuality, a third choice exists, not smoking and doing nothing. This is not to say an ex-smoker should not take up physical activities after quitting. But exercise should be done for the enjoyment and for the true benefits derived from it. The ex-smoker should do it because he or she wants to, not because he or she has to.

If you are going to develop a crutch, make sure it is one which you can maintain for the rest of your life without any interruption. One that carries no risks and can be done anywhere, anytime. About the only crutch which comes close to meeting these criteria is breathing. The day you have to stop breathing, smoking will be of little concern. But until that day, to stay free from cigarettes all you need to do is - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Joel

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