

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

When Smoking Was a "Choice Addiction"

It was cheap, well under 50 cents a pack. It was readily available. You could smoke it anywhere, any time you wanted. It was respectable. Your friends did it, your relatives did it, your co-workers did it, your boss did it, your doctor even did it. There was no social stigma attached, to the contrary, you were viewed as sophisticated, smart, tough, enlightened, or even healthy and robust as you deeply sucked in drag after drag. You never felt threatened by it - as far as you knew, it was safe. You never felt withdrawal, you seldom felt nicotine poisoning. When you could smoke any time you wanted, you were able to balance nicotine at optimal levels never facing extremes. Without facing extremes, you never recognized the consequences associated with using an addictive substance. You smoked because you liked it. For a while you knew you could take it or leave it.

But in 1964 things started to change. It was then the first Surgeon General's report was released. For the first time, the public was made aware about the early known dangers of smoking. The link to lung cancer was firmly established and the risks of heart disease were becoming apparent. Those who actually read the report and understood the implications of the early studies were the first to begin to stop smoking. Among the first groups of people to reduce smoking among their ranks were physicians and dentists. As more time passed and hundreds and then thousands of studies were reported, the link between smoking and premature death was becoming firmly established. Greater numbers of non-medical professionals were joining the ranks of ex-smokers. All of a sudden, the act of smoking was not viewed as an intelligent behavior. Smokers were not shunned, but they were no longer admired for their smoking behaviors.

Many American were attempting to quit but could not. For the first time, they were beginning to realize they were no longer smoking by choice. They were now hooked. They knew for medical reasons they should quit, but without understanding how to treat addiction they did not know how to stop. While they may not have been happy about this realization, they still felt comfortable smoking (unless they had developed crippling effects). After all, they could still smoke at the regular intervals necessary to

avoid the consequences of nicotine withdrawal syndrome. They were now drug addicts.

But nicotine addiction still had major advantages over any other addiction. Sure, it literally killed more people than all other addictions combined, including alcohol and heroin. But it was still legal, accessible, and relatively socially acceptable. These are important attributes for a drug of addiction. For, even though the long-term effects are lethal, the immediate short-term effects are relatively comfortable, if not downright pleasurable. What other drug could you self administer 40 plus times a day getting the little pharmacological fix with each and every hit that a smoker gets from every puff? Smokers still didn't face the chronic withdrawal syndromes other addicts faced from being unable to deliver ever larger amounts of a substance required by the increasing tolerance associated with addiction.

The biggest slam to affect the smoker was the danger associated with secondhand smoke. Nonsmokers, who made up the majority of the population, were becoming intolerant. Workplaces, homes of friends and families, public meeting places and even the smoker's own home were becoming smoke free. No longer could the smoker deliver the ever-increasing fixes necessary to avert nicotine withdrawal. Now the smoker was either oversmoking or undersmoking all day long. He oversmoked so he could get as much nicotine as he could possibly tolerate to get him through multiple hours before he could get to his next fix. He undersmoked for numerous hours when he was restrained by no-smoking rules and regulations. Chronic withdrawal or chronic poisoning was the norm experienced by smokers.

So, today, the smoker does not only have to worry about the slow crippling effects of smoking or the long-term lethal effects. He or she must be concerned about the day to day drudgery experienced by maintaining an addiction which is socially unacceptable and, hence, not allowed for many hours every day. Smokers today are suffering from oversmoking and undersmoking. They are scorned by many. They should be pitied by all and envied by none. The memories from the heyday of smoking are a fantasy in today's reality. The reality of smoking is a tortured life and a slow death. Don't get trapped in life of addiction - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Joel

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