Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Minimizing the Weight Gained from Quitting Smoking

You may have heard that you can't deal with weight control issues at the same time as quitting smoking. It may be fine for some people to gorge themselves while quitting smoking and deal with the weight at a later time. The health implication of a minor weight gain is negligible in comparison to the health risks posed by smoking. The average smoker would have to gain over 75 to 100 pounds to put the additional workload on the heart that is experienced by smoking, and this is not saying anything about the smoking cancer risk.

But for aesthetic and emotional reasons, allowing uncontrolled eating and the inevitable weight gain is a mistake that will often undermine the quitting process. Discouragement over appearance can cause some to return to smoking. Then the smoker has the additional problem of the extra weight combined with smoking. Sometimes the weight does not automatically disappear by simply relapsing back to smoking.

Weight gain following smoking cessation can be due to several factors. Smoking can have an effect on a person's metabolism and thus quitting can account for a small weight gain in some individuals. Gains of 5 to 10 pounds over a number of months can be attributed to metabolic alterations in some individuals. But once weight gain exceeds 10 pounds, other factors are more probably responsible.

Snacking between meals or increasing the overall size of meals, can easily result in the consuming of several hundred extra calories per day. Eating just an additional 100 calories a day will result in a one-pound fat gain in just over a month, 10.4 pounds in one year, and an extra 104 pounds in ten years. One hundred four pounds of fat from drinking the equivalent of one extra soft drink per day. This is why you often hear, "I didn't eat that much more but gained excessive amounts of weight!" True, they may not have eaten that much more daily, but they did it everyday, and the cumulative

effect can easily account for the "mysterious" weight gain.

Some ex-smokers eat more because they are just hungrier. They find themselves snacking between meals or needing to eat at times that were never necessary before. If they wait to eat too late in the day or there is too much time between meals, they may start to experience symptoms such as headaches, sleepiness or lack of energy. This can be a real side effect of smoking cessation.

The reason for the new sense of hunger is due to the fact that nicotine is an appetite suppressant. Smoking between meals seems to eradicate the need for the snacking behaviors experienced by many ex-smokers. Nicotine does this by elevating the blood sugar and blood fat levels, basically tricking the body into thinking that it has eaten more than it actually has. While that may help to control weight, it does so at a risk. Cigarettes used as an appetite suppressant can cause cancer, heart disease, strokes and a host of other illnesses.

The ex-smoker is no longer constantly administering an appetite suppressant. This does not mean he or she needs to increase caloric intake. It may be a matter of redistributing food normally eaten at single sittings at large meals into numerous smaller meals spaced throughout the day. This can allow for the snacking between meals ex-smokers are notorious for without increasing overall caloric intake. As an example, if breakfast consists of cereal, muffin, eggs, and a glass of juice, instead of eating all that food in one sitting, it can be dispersed over two or three times keeping a more even distribution of blood sugar throughout the morning hours. The same rule can apply to lunch and dinner, allowing for numerous snacking times throughout the day.

A more insidious mechanism of increased caloric intake can be experienced by unwittingly eating more at the end of meals. The smoking of a cigarette used to signify the end of a meal. With no cigarette to serve as a cue, the ex-smoker may continue to consume extra food after every meal whether or not he or she is hungry. The ex-smoker may not even know that he has eaten more in the process.

One solution to this behavior can be planning the meal out in advance. Calculate and prepare the amount of food you used to consume while smoking and acknowledge to yourself that you have finished. Another way is leave the table immediately upon completion of the meal. If you must stay at the table have a glass of cold water or a non-caloric beverage present. Don't leave a plate with scraps or desserts in easy reach.

Another very good solution is getting up and brushing your teeth. This can become the new cue for the end of the meal as well as improve dental hygiene. The clean feeling in your mouth may be a new pleasurable experience for an ex-smoker. While smoking, brushing of the teeth was often followed by a cigarette, compromising the overall cleansing process.

Besides controlling consumption, exercise is another tool to help with weight control efforts after quitting smoking. Twenty to thirty minutes of exercise done every other day can offset the metabolic alteration accompanied by smoking cessation. If you are eating "a little more," then more exercise can help offset that, too. But be realistic. You have to do a lot of activity to burn off a relatively small amount of food. That is not to say it is a waste of time to exercise to lose weight; just don't eat food with a shovel and go for a short walk and expect to work off the difference.

Successful weight control while quitting smoking can be accomplished with a little extra effort and planning. If weight gain is experienced during smoking cessation, steps should be implemented as soon as possible to reverse the process. Then to maintain a healthy lifestyle, watch your food consumption, exercise regularly, and most importantly - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Joel

WhyQuit.Com | **Joel's Library** | **Email Joel** | **Weight Gain Index** | **Next Article**