

Chapter 13**Homecoming****Arriving Home**

How do we know when we're home? If you've ever moved, you know there's a big difference between moving into a house and having it feel like home. The correct answer is, you are home when you feel it! Some feel at home in a couple of weeks while others need months.

A Silent Celebration

Amazingly, within 2 to 4 months the adjustment process transports most in recovery to a point where they experience that very first day where they never once "think" to themselves, "gee, I'd sure like a smoke," "a dip," "a chew," "a lozenge," "a piece of nicotine gum." After the first such day they become more and more common. Soon, they become our new norm in life, with the distance between the occasional "thought" growing further and further apart.

If it happens sooner or takes longer, don't fret! If sooner, enjoy it, If longer, patience, it's coming!

Long-Term Quiet and Calm

Imagine entire days, weeks, months and after a few years, maybe even years without your mind ever once feeling an urge to use nicotine. Imagine living in a constant state of 100% total comfort with no nicotine use related anxieties whatsoever - none, zero, nil, complete and total tranquility. It's where hundreds of millions of comfortably recovered ex-users reside today. Were any of them truly stronger than nicotine? Were any of them stronger than us, or is that just another lame excuse we used?

After arresting my thirty-year, three pack-a-day dependency, my recovery evolved to the point of substantial comfort by about eight weeks, a few weeks earlier than most but later than some. It was then that I experienced my last major subconscious crave episode and started to notice that the once steady stream of thoughts of wanting were ever so slowly becoming fewer, shorter and generally less intense.

During the first few weeks I worked hard to maintain a strong positive attitude while refusing to allow negative thoughts to infect my thinking and dreams. While feeding myself large doses of positive thought I also confronted and analyzed those remaining thoughts that seemed to keep inviting relapse. Soon, it was no longer a matter of trying to believe what I was telling myself. I did believe in the new nicotine-free me!

Although at times intense, I did my best to remain focused on the long overdue healing occurring inside this body. I saw each and every day as a full and complete victory in and of itself. Today I was free and today I continued to heal! The little gifts along the way - the smells, tastes, energy, extra pocket change, the whiteness emerging in my smile, pride, empty pockets, a bit bigger step, odorless fingers, hope, endurance, an ash-less world, new found time, long overdue self-respect, gradually lengthening periods of comfort, freedom and even the few extra pounds - was simply me coming home to meet me.

Eventually the minor urges and periods of thought fixation became further and further apart. After two years of freedom I found myself going months without challenge. The last time I experienced anything that can be fairly called an “urge” was in December 2001, two years and seven months after starting my journey. Am I average or normal? Probably not. I worked with far too many victims to have retained even one use justification.

Gradually Diminishing Thoughts and Urges

During early recovery, periods of challenge may at times felt overwhelming. But hurricane force winds are now long gone. Still, it is entirely normal during the first couple of years to still be having thoughts of wanting and even encounter remote, seasonal or infrequent nicotine feeding cues. They may be associated with uncommon events such as relationships ending, crossing paths with an old friend, the birth of a baby, a wedding receptions or even death.

It is possible to retain romantic thoughts about using, thoughts capable of fostering urge and desire for as long as our mind is able to concentrate and focus upon them. While most will be quick stiff breezes a few may claim the status of storms.

The beauty of recovery is that with each passing day the frequency, duration and intensity of challenge is "generally" on the decline. But like trying to watch a rose bud open, seeing the decline while living it can at times seem nearly impossible. Before we know it the storms turn to breezes and then to a guest now and then.

One of the most popular discussions at WhyQuit’s peer support group Freedom is entitled, “Tell a newbie how many seconds a day you still want a cigarette.” Below are representative entries made during 2008. The opening time period is how long the person has remained nicotine-free:

- 2 months, 26 days: “once every two weeks for about 3-5 minutes.” Diane
- 3 years, 3 months: “a few times in the past year the thought of smoking crossed my mind.” Joseph
- 1 year, 3 months: “zip, zero, nada!” Melrose
- 4 years: “How many seconds a year? None!!!” Laura
- 2 years: “I never thought I could stop smoking or that I would completely stop

thinking about cigarettes – but I have and its wonderful!” Sally

- 7 years, 3 weeks: “My family smokes. I never desire it even if they’re around me smoking.” Anne
- 1 year, 4 months: “I think about having one on what probably amounts to about 6 seconds a week!” Annies1
- 3 years, 1 month: “nul, nix, none, nothing, zip, zero ... honestly, my nicotine-related thoughts are annoyance at the smell of cigarettes if I can’t avoid it.” Meg
- 2 months, 14 days: “Maybe 3-5 seconds every couple of days. Seriously, it does get so much easier.” Beth
- 2 months: “...thought a few times of having a smoke but it’s a passing thought now, it has little strength.” Dave T
- 5 months, 2 weeks: “I sometimes get hooked into a romantic thought about smoking, a memory, but it is merely a thought and not a desire or a need or a want.” Moira
- 7 months, 2 weeks: “Never a want, need or crave ... Passing thought? Maybe a couple times a week.” RJW
- 2 years, 1 month: “I never think of smoking really. I think I had a fleeting thought one spring day when I was having a glass of wine and standing on the deck.” Jeff
- 4 years: “I never think about smoking, except the occasional wish for a friend or acquaintance to know the peace that comes with never taking another puff.” Kevin
- 4 months, 2 weeks: “...maybe six or seven seconds of “thoughts” a week. I’m one very happy camper.” Pat
- 18 days: “Probably about 4 minutes thinking about it, maybe 30 seconds with a bit of an empty feeling, craving something that might be nicotine.” Maisie
- 67 days: thoughts have completely dropped off to random, fleeting, a spit second if I choose to notice them. Occasionally, there is a new trigger but relatively easy to deal with no that I’m no longer struggling.” Ilona
- 2 months, 12 days: “I only think about cigarettes on the weekend at a nightclub, then a smoker stands next to me and I have to move because it smells so bad.” Rochelle
- 32 days: I work with smokers and dippers all day. Every time I saw someone smoking I would think Hmm ... time for a smoke and actually go for my pocket to get one out and then remember- I can't! This went on for the first two weeks and I was wondering if this was how it was going to be for me forever. I had smoked a pack plus a day for 30 years it was so much a part of my life that I figured I would always feel the urge to smoke when I saw someone else smoke. After the 2nd week I was feeling much more confident and determined and when I thought about smoking it was that I was sooo ... glad that I didn't anymore. Now after four weeks plus I think about smoking maybe 20 seconds a day and it’s never an urge to smoke, its a sense of something missing but not missed. The law of addiction is the first thing I think of when I think about smoking and I know that as long as I remember that I will Never Take Another Puff.” Ginz
- 1 month, 1 hour: “It's still early in the recovery process so I'm not going to say I don't think about them...because I do, but in all honesty it's not really that much.

The thoughts come quickly from time to time, but they leave just as quickly.” Abu Daud1

- 11 months, 1 week: “I might have had a thought about having a cigarette a few days ago but I'm not sure. It could be my old age kicking in. They pop into my head and out again so rarely and so quickly they don't even register anymore.” Pat
- 2 years, 2 months: “ZERO!” Melrose
- 8 weeks, 2 days: “I think about smoking most days but spend NO time wanting to smoke now. There is nothing I want back about nicotine and cigarettes.” Doc
- 2 years, 4 months: “I can truthfully say that I just do not think of smoking. I never thought I would be able to say that, but it's true!!” Vicki
- 1 month, 3 days: 1-3 minutes per day on average I still want a cigarette. It's not a craving that happens during the first 3 days, not an itch that goes for 1-3 weeks after you quit. It's just a small thought.” Levaser

It has been years since I've had anything you'd consider a craving. Maybe someday I will, maybe tomorrow. But if and when it arrives I'll wear a smile during the entire brief encounter, as it will be a long overdue reminder of the amazing journey I once made.

Welcome home! We each get to stay so long as we remain committed to a single principle ... no nicotine today, never use nicotine again!