

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

"Why are you so hard on the concept of cheating when quitting smoking?"

"When I go to Weight Watchers and say I cheated on dessert, they still applaud and cheer me on to keep trying." "Why don't you offer me similar support with cigarettes?" Recently, an angry clinic participant attacked my lack of enthusiasm for her technique after relapsing on her fifth day without smoking.

I explained that trying to change a behavior such as overeating or an addiction such as smoking requires two distinctly different treatments. While it is true that "cheating" in dieting is a common practice under certain conditions such as holidays or parties, cheating with an addiction is synonymous with total relapse. Taking a piece of cake will not make a person 50 pounds heavier the next day. On the other hand, taking a cigarette can and will lead an ex-smoker right back to smoking, usually reaching the old level of consumption within days or weeks.

While many weight control programs may condone the possibility of a slip, dealing with addictions such as heroin, alcohol, or nicotine requires the total commitment of the addict to completely avoid any use of the abused substance. Because of this simple rule of total abstinence to ensure success, I can offer no applause to any individual who allows himself or herself to take a cigarette because of stress, weight, partying or any other reason.

Relapse is relapse, no matter what the reason for its occurrence. The goal of any ex-smoker is to avoid returning to the nicotine addiction. When you encounter situations that seem to warrant having a cigarette, take a minute to reflect back on what it meant to be a drug addict.

Coughing, wheezing, sore throats and shortness of breath. Constant threats by your doctor of "quit smoking or else." Bad breath and smelly clothes and hair. Headaches, exhaustion, and just generally feeling miserable on days when you oversmoked.

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Always worrying that you may have left a cigarette burning in your home or office. That panicky feeling when you realized you ran out of cigarettes. Being unwelcome in the homes of family and friends while smoking. Spending hundreds or thousands of dollars a year on cigarettes and clothes and furniture which needed to be replaced because of cigarette burns. Nagging from children or parents to quit. Being the only person at a party smoking and feeling like a social misfit. Being totally controlled by cigarettes. Not a pretty picture, is it?

So next time you feel like you need or "deserve" a cigarette, consider the consequences. There is no such thing as cheating, slipping or experimenting. There is no chance of smoking "a cigarette." The only options that exist for you are success or failure. Total freedom or total relapse. Within seconds you will realize that you have no desire to return to such a miserable existence. You can pat yourself on the back for overcoming another obstacle. You realize you like yourself too much to smoke. Continued success depends on one simple technique - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Joel

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