

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

"I would rather be a little overweight and not smoking than underweight and dead."

This thought-provoking sentiment was one panelist's opinion of the ten pounds she gained when giving up cigarettes. While it is not inevitable, many people do gain weight when quitting smoking. The reason is quite easy to explain - they eat more.

People eat more when quitting smoking for a variety of reasons. Food is often enjoyed more since the improved senses in ex-smokers make it smell and taste better. For some, cigarettes decrease the appetite. Others use cigarettes as their cue that the meal has ended. Take away the cigarette and they don't know it is time to stop eating. Social situations with food used to be easy as a smoker. When a smoker is finished with his food, he can sit and smoke while conversing with others at the table. Without cigarettes, he feels awkward just sitting, so he often orders extra coffee and dessert to last the duration of the conversation. All of these different behaviors add up to one result--extra calories eaten--which results in gaining weight.

Weight gain can be extremely dangerous to an ex-smoker, but not because of the strain on the heart. An average ex-smoker would have to gain approximately 75 pounds to put a strain on his heart equal to the extra risk associated with smoking a pack a day. Even then, the extra weight would not cause the lung destruction, cancer risk and many other conditions caused by smoking. The real danger of the extra weight is that many ex-smokers use it as an excuse to go back to smoking. They think that if they smoke again they will automatically lose weight. To their unpleasant surprise, many return to smoking and keep the added pounds.

One clinic participant told how after three months without smoking she gained 15 pounds. Her doctor told her that she must lose the weight. He said that if she had to, just smoke one or two cigarettes a day to help. If her doctor understood the addictive potential of cigarettes he would never have given her such advice. For, as soon as she took her first few cigarettes, she started smoking in excess of 3 packs per day. Her

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weight gain did not go away. When her doctor realized that she had returned to smoking, he warned her that it was imperative that she quit. In her condition smoking was extremely dangerous. So not only did she still have to lose 15 pounds, but once again she had to go through the withdrawal process of stopping smoking.

Smokers, ex-smokers or never-smokers can all lose weight the same way. The three ways to lose weight are to decrease the amount of calories one eats, increase one's activities to burn extra calories, or, a combination of both techniques. While dieting may be more difficult for some after smoking cessation, it is possible, and in many ways ex-smokers have major advantages over smokers for controlling their weight.

The most obvious advantage is that not smoking allows a person to do more physical activities, burning off fat in the process. When smoking, exercise is tiresome, painful and for some, impossible. But with the improvement in breathing and cardiovascular fitness accompanying smoking cessation, exercise can become a regular routine in the ex-smoker's lifestyle. And while dieting may be difficult at first, ex-smokers should realize that if they had the capability of breaking free from cigarettes, they could also decrease the amount they eat. It is simply a matter of using the same determination initially used to quit smoking.

So, the next time you look in the mirror or step on a scale and feel that you are unhappy with your weight, start taking some sensible steps to deal with it. Become active, eat lower calorie, nutritious foods, and pat yourself on the back for once again taking control of your life. Not only will you lose weight, look and feel better, but you will have done it all without smoking. With that knowledge you should be extra proud. Diet, exercise and - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Joel

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