

Freedom from Nicotine – The Journey Home

Chapter 8: The First 72 Hours

Smart Turkey

Ready to begin? Will this be smart turkey? In other words, are you keen and wise to core cold turkey recovery insights?

Have you accepted that you're dealing with real drug addiction in every sense, involving the need to reclaim the same brain dopamine pathways as the recovering alcoholic or heroin addict (Chapter 1)?

Have you mastered recovery's sole determining principle, the Law of Addiction (Chapter 2)?

Have you discarded the two most destructive relapse rationalizations: falling for the tease of "just one" or "just once" and the dependency ingrained mirage that nicotine relieves stress when dependency actually inflames it (Chapter 4)?

Have you reviewed other common hazards and pitfalls such as early alcohol use, avoidable blood sugar swings, an awareness that your blood caffeine level is about to double, and how extra food can become a replacement crutch (Chapter 6)? If so, you're ready!

Still apprehensive? Relax, it's totally understandable.

The following cold turkey tips are a summary of key recovery insights. After each tip is a reference to the chapter where you'll find a more in-depth review.

Summary of Basic Recovery Tips

1. **Law of Addiction** - "Administration of a drug to an addict will cause re-establishment of chemical dependence upon the addictive substance."

Nicotine addiction is "real" drug addiction. It's every bit as real and permanent as alcoholism. The brain dopamine pathway wanting that's felt for nicotine is no different than the wanting felt by other drug addicts for their drug.

The same dopamine pathways that make thoughts of ending food use unthinkable have been taken hostage by nicotine. It's their job to make activities that activate this circuitry nearly impossible in the short term to forget or ignore.

It's why withdrawal and recovery are necessary. It's the time needed to get clean and move beyond this brain circuitry's influence. It's why there is no such thing as just one, or just once. Remember, without food we die, without nicotine we thrive. (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2)

2. Measure Victory One Day at a Time - Forget about stopping "forever." It's the biggest psychological bite imaginable. Instead, adopt a do-able "one day at a time" recovery philosophy, or one challenge or hour at a time if needed. (Chapter 5)

3. Record and Carry Your Motivations - Panic is a possibility if suddenly challenged. Rational thinking is suddenly abandoned as the body's fight or flight neuro-chemical response is activated. Your primitive impulsive mind suddenly in control, it can feel like time has slowed to near standstill. Instantly, you've forgotten the reasons that motivated you to want to take back control of your mind and life.

But wait. Just as the situation is feeling hopeless, you recall that you'd made a list of your reasons and that you have that list with you. You pull it out, begin reading it, and before finished the challenge peaks in intensity and begins to subside. Victory is once again yours! (Chapter 5) (Appendix: Recovery Form)

4. Don't Skip Meals - While still using, you may have thought you were skipping meals but you weren't. Each puff of nicotine acted as a spoon pumping stored fats and sugars into your bloodstream. Why cause low blood sugar to add hunger cravings atop nicotine cravings? Hourly nicotine feedings no longer feeding you stored energy, why invite your inexperience in responding to hunger to add lots of needless extra pounds?

While learning to properly fuel your body again, strive to eat smaller portions of healthy food more frequently, 3-5 times daily. (Chapter 6)

5. Three Days of Natural Juices - If your health and diet allow it, consider drinking extra acidic fruit juice for the first three days. Cranberry is excellent. It will both help stabilize your blood sugar level and accelerate nicotine's elimination. (Chapter 6)

6. Do It For You! - We cannot quit for others. It must be our gift to us. Trying to quit for others creates a natural sense of self-deprivation that's a recipe for relapse. (Chapter 5)

7. Attitude - Strive to embrace your healing, not fight it. Accept the fact that noticing and feeling your healing for a few weeks or months is good and wonderful, a tiny price to pay in reclaiming your freedom, mind, and life. Although not mandatory in staying free, a positive and accepting attitude will diminish the anxieties felt, and accelerate letting go and arriving home.

Remember, your use-conditioned and healing subconscious is always listening. Don't be afraid to talk to and encourage it to switch teams and help protect against that first recovery destroying puff, vape, dip, or chew.(Chapter 5)

8. **Get Rid of All Nicotine** - Reflect upon the insanity of an alcoholic in withdrawal keeping a bottle handy. Keeping a stash is begging for relapse. Totally destroy - beyond salvage - all nicotine products. (Chapter 5)

9. **Caffeine/Nicotine Interaction** - Nicotine doubles the rate by which the body depletes caffeine. Consider a caffeine reduction of up to one-half if troubled by anxieties or poor sleeping. (Chapter 6)

10. **Aggressively Extinguish Nicotine Use-Cues** - Most use-cues are extinguished by a single encounter during which the subconscious fails to receive the expected result: nicotine. Subconsciously triggered craves normally peak in intensity within 3-5 minutes. But normal cessation time distortion can combine with panic to make minutes feel like hours. Keep a clock handy to maintain an honest perspective. Don't hide from your healing and reclaiming life, accelerate it. (Chapter 11)

11. **Crave Coping Techniques** - Give distraction a try. Engage in slow, deep, and deliberate breathing while striving to clear your mind of all needless chatter, while focusing upon your favorite person, place, or thing. Another method of physically challenging your brain's focus is to slowly and repeatedly move your eyes horizontally, as far to the left, and then as far to the right as possible.

Yet another approach is to say your ABCs while associating each letter with your favorite food, person, or place. For example, the letter "A" is for grandma's hot apple pie. "B" is for warm buttered biscuits. It's unlikely that you'll ever make it to the challenging letter Q before the episode peaks in intensity and victory is once again yours.

Another tactic is to embrace a crave episode's energy by mentally reaching out inside your mind and wrapping imaginary arms around it. A crave cannot cut us, burn us, shock us, or make us bleed. Be brave just once. In your mind, wrap your arms around the crave's anxiety energy. Feel the sensation as its anxiety energy slowly fizzles and dies while within your embrace. Yes, another use-cue bites the dust and your healing continues!

Don't forget about taking out and reading your list of reasons for wanting to break free.

And should you find yourself reaching for weight generating extra food to stimulate dopamine flow, reach for zero-calorie "aaah" sensations instead: a slow deep breath or, if available, a cool glass of water, or a great big hug.(Chapter 11)

12. **Early Alcohol Use** - Alcohol, an inhibition diminishing substance, is associated with roughly

half of all relapses. Be extremely careful with early alcohol use. Endeavor to get your recovery legs under you first.

Once ready, consider drinking at home first without nicotine around, going out with friends but refraining from drinking during the first outing, or spacing drinks further apart or drinking water or juice between drinks. Have an escape plan and a backup, and be ready to quickly deploy both. (Chapter 6)

13. Avoid Crutches - A crutch is any form of reliance that is leaned upon so heavily in supporting recovery that if quickly removed would elevate the risk of relapse. For example, it's okay to begin an exercise program. Just don't allow your recovery to become dependent upon it, so that an injury, bad weather, or a sudden lack of time leaves you feeling that your healing can't continue. (Chapter 6)

14. Extra Fruit & Veggies - Want to minimize weight gain? Pre-cut, prepare, and keep handy healthy fruits and vegetables instead of candies, chips, and pastries. Celery and carrots can be used safely as short-term substitutes. A 2012 study found that increased fruit and vegetable consumption can substantially increase 30-day cessation rates. (Chapter 6)

15. No Legitimate Excuse for Relapse - Recognize that nicotine use will not solve any crisis. Fully accept that there is absolutely no legitimate excuse for relapse, including an auto accident, financial crisis, the end of a relationship, job loss, a terrorist attack, a hurricane, the birth of a baby, falling stocks, or the eventual inevitable death of those we love. (Chapter 14)

16. Reward Yourself - Consider using some of the money you no longer spend on nicotine to be nice to you. It's money that truly would have been burned, vaporized, or chewed to pieces. Don't hesitate to splurge and purchase something that you never would otherwise have bought. Give yourself a gift. You've earned it. (Chapter 5)

17. Just One Rule - There is only one recovery rule which if followed provides a 100 percent guarantee of success: no nicotine today! (Chapter 2)

Now, all the smart turkey needs is commitment.

Genuine Commitment

Commitment Defined

Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality. Commitment is to decide, to pledge, and then do. It's about creating a loyal memory muscle that continues working when the justifications for beginning are no longer illuminated by the spotlight of the mind.

Unfortunately, far too many nicotine addicts play pretend quitting games, millions upon millions until too late. Their reasons are many.

It allows them to make-believe that they're working on the problem, that it's being addressed. "I'll do better next time!" It buys their psyche and self-esteem temporary peace of mind. "Well, at least I tried."

And let's face it, a pretend or half-hearted attempt can briefly help get that pestering friend or loved one off your back. The more fiery and temperamental the quitting charade, the longer it silences well-intended nagging.

Sham quitting can be part of a half-baked scheme to qualify for cheaper insurance, to win a bet, land a job, or even earn a date with a non-smoker. Such motives are often gift-wrapped in substitute nicotine delivery weaning games. There, as many of us learned, such games quickly grow old or give birth to additional recovery hurdles.

And then there are attempts driven by a growing awareness of the horrific damage being done within: gradually diminishing abilities, a nagging cough, artery blockage, that first root canal or pulled tooth, bronchitis, an A1C warning of approaching type 2 diabetes, an x-ray suggesting early emphysema, or one of a hundred other dependency related health scares.

A little fear can be a good thing. But when it's our sole motivation, like holding our breath, we can only remain afraid for so long. In that the body's ability to mend after quitting gradually erodes most health concerns, relapse is often just a matter of time.

The common thread with farce cessation is a lack of commitment.

"Well, maybe I'm not ready to commit just yet"? Oh, you're plenty ready, as evidenced by you reading these words.

Still, it takes more than being ready to move commitment beyond the starting line. It's discombobulating thinking about the temporary discomfort associated with getting serious about saying "no" to your prison bars, to the thousands of old wanting satisfaction memories that keep teasing an addict back.

And the thought of quitting forever can be disturbing, that "That's my last puff, vape, dip or chew ever!"

Would we question wearing a cast for the 6-8 weeks needed to heal a broken bone? Be honest, is your addiction and the need for recovery any less real than an untreated broken bone?

Are you curious about meeting the real yet forgotten you? (Chapter 3). All memory of the beauty

of being free was long ago buried by nicotine's repeated activation of your brain's priorities enforcer. The only path home is to make accomplishment that circuitry's new priority. And that happens when we muster and merge the moxie to say "no" with real commitment.

Commitment's Degree and Duration

Fact: just one puff and up to half of dopamine pathway receptors become occupied by nicotine. [1] Like the alcoholic, heroin, or meth addict, we can't cheat or fool the design of brain circuitry that's been permanently compromised by nicotine.

Thus, recovery is all or nothing.

And now for the great news. While the degree of commitment required is 100 percent, commitment's duration can be as short as circumstances dictate: an hour, that next challenge, or just one day at a time.

Better yet, commitment gradually becomes effortless.[2] Imagine entire days, weeks, months, or even years without once wanting to smoke, dip, vape or chew. Like learning to crawl and stand before walking and running, the return of a calm and quiet mind awaits you.

Even the uneducated successful ex-user usually falls in love with being free. It occurs despite continuing to harbor false beliefs such as nicotine being a stress-buster (Chapter 4) or that they liked or loved using (Chapter 4).

How do we know? Because relapse studies teach us that 90 percent who stop for 90 days are still not smoking at 6 months.[3]

Why? Because being free grows on you. Because pre-quitting dread, fears, and anxieties evolve into like or even love. Because nicotine addiction is captivity that reinforces with every use.

Only when we muster the courage to take that first baby step toward arresting our dependency's endless need-feed cycle can truth begin taking root.

Still, if just starting out, the huge bite thought of quitting forever can feel overwhelming.

The great news is that the more effortless, easy, and comfortable recovery grows, the more valued and cherished being free becomes. And it isn't long before a "one day at a time" mindset finds itself embracing thoughts of forever, of never, ever using again.

Although my mentor Joel Spitzer conducted more than 350 two-week stop smoking clinics, he quickly discovered a number of durable truths. He noticed that within two weeks, nearly all participants were beginning to savor growing periods of calm, that, for the most part, pre-cessation fears had melted away.

So, it's no accident that most of Joel's clinic follow-up reinforcement letters and all of his more than 400 YouTube videos end by reminding us that when it comes to successful quitting, "it's a matter of finally making and sticking to a personal commitment to Never Take Another Puff" (NTAP).[4]

Early Commitment's Mindset

The first few days of an educated recovery are a cakewalk for some, seriously challenging for others, and easier than expected for most.

Although it sounds strange, within reason, everything felt during the up to 72 hours needed to purge the body of nicotine and move beyond peak withdrawal is beneficial and good, not bad.

What more honest signs of healing could there be? Does it make sense to fear healing? Why resist taking back our minds? Why fight coming home? Why fear returning to entire days where we never once want to use?

Like getting through three days of the flu or six weeks of wearing a cast, why not strive to get as comfortable as possible being temporarily uncomfortable? As Chief Dan George says, "endeavor to persevere." And do so with class, dignity, and style.

Should you ever feel your commitment beginning to wane be sure to review the commitment reinforcement resources outlined in Chapter 5. Most important, be sure to review your list of reasons for wanting to be clean and free.

The balance of FFN-TJH details four layers of recovery: (1) physical (Chapter 9), (2) emotional (Chapter 10), (3) subconscious (Chapter 11), and (4) conscious (Chapter 12). It closes with chapters on homecoming (Chapter 13) and how to avoid complacency & relapse (Chapter 14).

Again, there was always only one rule. It's that lapse equals relapse, that one equals all, that just one hit of nicotine and the mind will re-activate thousands of old nicotine use memories that will place using yet again on, a par with that next meal.

Just that first brave step, yes you can.

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1. Brody AL et al, Cigarette smoking saturates brain alpha 4 beta 2 nicotinic acetylcholine receptors, Archives of General Psychiatry, August 2006, Volume 63(8), Pages 907-915.
 2. Freedom, Tell a newbie how many seconds a day you still want a cigarette, <https://whyquit.com/freedom/tell-a-newbie/tell-a-newbie-01.html> (read more than 800 support group responses to this 2001 question posed by Joel Spitzer).
 3. Gilpin EA, Pierce JP, Farkas AJ, Duration of smoking abstinence and success in quitting, The Journal of the National Cancer Institute, April 16, 1997, Volume 89(8), Pages 572-576.
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Originally released on January 1, 2009, the 4th revision was completed October 15, 2020. Individual book topics are shared below and a full 10.8MB 415 page PDF is available at WhyQuit.com/FFN.pdf.

All images have been removed from the following PDF chapters so as to make the files smaller and faster opening on mobile devices. All chapter topics (136) are available with images as [topic web pages](#) in HTML format.

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Only one rule. No nicotine today!

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