Chapter 3: Quitting "You"

Recovery Instead of Quitting

The real "you" never, ever needed nicotine. You were fine on your own. The real "you" didn't need the sense of wanting satisfaction that arrived with each new supply, or the anxieties associated with needing more.

The real us typically functioned more towards the center, without nicotine's feeding cycle mood swings.

So what if you never, ever needed to inhale or juice nicotine again? What if your mind was once again allowed to be itself, filled with a rich sense of calm while stimulating its dopamine pathways the natural way, via great flavors, big hugs, cool water, a sense of accomplishment, friendship, nurturing, love and intimacy?

What if days, weeks or even months passed comfortably, without once thinking about wanting to use nicotine? Would that be a good thing or bad?

Quitting is a word that tugs at emotion. By definition it associates itself with departing, leaving, forsaking and abandonment.

But the real abandonment took place on the day nicotine-dependent pathways suppressed all remaining memory of the beauty of life without nicotine, when no longer able to recall how fantastic we functioned without it.

This book isn't about quitting. It's about recovering a person long ago forgotten, the real and wonderful "you!"

The word "quitting" tends to paint nicotine cessation in gray and black, in the doom and gloom of bad and horrible. It breeds anticipatory fears, inner demons, needless anxieties, external enemies, and visions of suffering. It fosters a natural sense of self-deprivation, of leaving something valuable behind.

Now, contrast quitting with recovery. Recovery doesn't run or hide from our addiction. Instead, it boldly embraces who we became, and every aspect of this temporary journey of re-adjustment.

When knowledge-based, we're looking for recovery symptoms, emotions, conditioning, and junkie thinking, and view each encounter as an opportunity to reclaim another piece of a nicotine-free life.

Nicotine dependency recovery presents an opportunity to experience what may be our richest period of

repair and self-discovery ever. Tissues are allowed to heal. Senses awaken and the brain's neurochemicals again flow in response to life, not nicotine.
It's a period where each challenge overcome awards us another piece of our puzzle, a puzzle that once complete reflects a life reclaimed.

It is not necessary that we delete the word "quit" from our thinking, vocabulary or this book (at least not entirely). But it might be helpful to reflect upon when the real "quitting" took place, when freedom ended and that next fix became life's primary objective.

Although probably impossible to believe right now, you won't be leaving anything of value behind. Nothing! Everything done while under nicotine's influence can be done as well or better as "us."

Buried Alive by Nicotine "Aaah"s

Again, try to remember. What was it like being you? What was it like to function every morning without nicotine, to finish a meal, travel, talk on the phone, have a disagreement, start a project or take a break without putting nicotine into your body?

What was it like before nicotine took control? What was it like residing inside a mind that did not want for nicotine?

Possibly the most fascinating aspect of drug addiction is just how quickly all remaining memory of life without the drug gets buried by high-definition wanting-relief memories.

As explored in Chapter 4, how can we claim to like or love something when we have almost no remaining memory of what life without it was like? What basis exists for honest comparison?

Why be afraid of returning to a calm and quiet place where you no longer crave a chemical that today, every day, you cannot seem to get off your mind, a chemical that is a mandatory part of each day's plan?

Why fear arriving here on Easy Street with nearly a billion comfortably recovered nicotine addicts? Is freedom of thought and action a good thing or bad? If good, why fear it?

How wonderful would it be to again live inside a quiet mind where our addiction's chatter gradually becomes infrequent and then rare?

Slave to our world of nicotine-normal, we were each provided a new identity. Captive brain dopamine pathways did their designed job and did it well. They left us convinced that our next nicotine fix was central to survival, as important as water or food.

I recently read disturbing comments posted by more than one hundred long-term nicotine gum addicts. One, a 36-year-old woman, wrote, "I have to say, I traded one problem for another. I chew 4 mg 24/7 and can go through 170 pieces in less than 6 days. I have been chewing Nicorette now for 12 years. If I run out for a short time my mood becomes irrational. It is costing me more money than I have. I have chosen Nicorette over food many times."[1]

We can only hope that such honesty leads her to ask and answer the bigger question, "why?" Hopefully someday soon she'll feel what it's like to comfortably engage her entire day without once wanting for nicotine.

Contrary to the false survival training lesson constantly being pounded into her brain by her hijacked priorities teacher, she'd be leaving nothing of value behind. Even the love in her heart, she'd get to bring it with her.

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1. AskAPatient.com , Nicorette User Database, January 25, 2008 comments by a 36 year-old female user. Also see Polito JR, Long-term Nicorette gum users losing hair and teeth, WhyQuit.com, December 1, 2008.

An Infected Life

Whether a closet user who hides their addiction, a low tolerance level addict whose twice-daily use has them denying it, or a heavy and open addict like I was, our dependency infected far more of life than we care or cared to admit.

Once we permit ourselves to begin looking closely, it becomes hard to find any aspect of life that wasn't, to some degree, touched by our addiction.

Our endless feeding cycle was a perpetual interruption. Aside from the time devoted to using, there was non-stop use planning, the need to re-supply, clean-up, and return to the activity use had previously interrupted, or to a new one.

As smokers or e-cigarette users, how many times daily did we suck 1 milligram of nicotine into our lungs? As snuff users, how many times did a 2.5-gram pinch stay in your mouth until generating 3.6 milligrams of pure nicotine juice? If a chewer, how many times daily was 7.9 grams of loose tobacco jawed until it let go of 4.5 milligrams of tissue penetrating nicotine?[1]

And then we'd wait for nicotine's two-hour elimination half-life and a falling tonic dopamine level to command us to use again. Or we could accelerate nicotine elimination by encountering stress, drinking alcohol, or consuming vitamin C.[2]

Nicotine's presence altered our body's natural sensitivities. It destroyed our ability to relax, hijacked our priorities, and consumed precious time.

Smoking it diminished lung function while gradually destroying our bloodstream's ability to receive and transport life-giving oxygen. Altered vaping sensitivities include living with chronic dry mouth and dehydration, sore throats, a now and then flavoring reaction, or even tinnitus (ear ringing) or headaches.

Whether smoked, chewed or sucked, tobacco diminished the accuracy of our smell and taste, while making us home to smoke's more than 4,000 chemicals or oral tobacco's more than 2,550.[3] If a smoker, we introduced up to 81 cancer-causing chemicals[4]. If an oral tobacco user, up to 28 [5].

And e-cig users need to remain mindful not only about the impurities in untested juice but about the possibility of their mod's vaporizing coil getting so hot that it begins generating the carcinogens formaldehyde and aldehyde.[6]

Like a mouse on an exercise wheel, there's no end to this endless cycle of madness unless we get off, unless nicotine's arrival ends.

Forgotten Relaxation

Two million years of evolution prepared us to fight or flee the now extinct saber tooth tiger. Our body's response to sensing danger or sudden stress is activation of the "fight or flight" pathways of the sympathetic nervous system. Nicotine also activates these pathways.[7]

Nicotine's arrival in the brain causes the release of nor-adrenaline (nor-epinephrine), which in turn causes more than 100 neurochemicals to prepare the body to run for its life or fight.

Is it normal to spend the balance of life under the influence of an adrenaline releasing central nervous system stimulant?

Before climbing into bed to sleep, is it normal to consume a chemical that will make our heart pound up to 17.5 beats per minute faster,[8] that elevates blood pressure, restricts extremity blood flow causing the temperature of our fingers to drop up to seven degrees,[9] that accelerates breathing, dilates our pupils, perks our senses, shuts down digestion, and that triggers the release of glucose and fats from our body's energy stores?

As active addicts, most of us claimed that nicotine helped us relax. But activating our fight or flight response shows just how neurochemically confused we became about nicotine's impact upon us.

Try to imagine what it would be like to go hours or an entire day without once having adrenaline pumped into your bloodstream.

What would it feel like to stop endlessly beating yourself as if whipping a tired horse, to stop responding to non-existent saber tooth tigers, to again know and bask in full, deep and complete relaxation for extended periods of time?

Forgotten Calm During Crisis

Have you ever noticed what you reach for during crisis? That's right - as just reviewed - a nervous system stimulant that activates the body's fight or flight response.

While stressful situations can by themselves activate our body's fight or flight response, why guarantee that it happens? When confronted with stress, why intentionally make your heart pound faster, elevate

your blood pressure, and induce extra anxiety?

Even more disturbing, intentionally adding the body's fight or flight response to every stressful situation was nothing compared to the reason why we reached for nicotine during crisis, because stress accelerated removal of nicotine from our bloodstream, causing the onset of early withdrawal.

We'll review how stressful situations threw us into withdrawal in the next chapter (Use Rationalizations) under the heading "Use relieves stress and anxiety."

Here, simply ask yourself this. What would life's stressful situations be like if the anxieties of early nicotine withdrawal were never again added to them, resulting in fewer situations activating the body's fight or flight response?

Imagine being far calmer during crisis. What would it be like to again be you?

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Forgotten Breathing & Endurance

Smokers not only suffer from nicotine addiction but the ravaging effects of thousands of inhaled chemicals upon their lungs and respiratory system.

What was it like to run like the wind, to engage in an extended period of brisk physical activity without

becoming seriously winded?

What was it like to climb flight after flight of stairs, to play full-court basketball, or to chase a child or the family pet without ending up gasping for air?

Every now and then I meet a current smoker who proudly boasts that they enjoy running. What they don't seem to appreciate is the tremendous strain they subject their heart and body to when doing so. It's a matter of vigorously working muscles obtaining enough oxygen.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless toxic gas produced when any carbon-based material is burned, including tobacco. When smoking, the amount of carbon monoxide entering the bloodstream varies greatly, up to 25mg per cigarette. Variability can be related to the particular brand being smoked, how intensely the smoker smokes, or whether filter ventilation holes are covered by their lips.

Without oxygen, the body's cells suffocate and die. The primary function of our lungs is to allow the entry of life-giving oxygen from the atmosphere into our bloodstream, and to then transfer carbon dioxide from our bloodstream back out into the atmosphere.

This exchange of gases takes place within an estimated 480 million thinly walled air sacs called alveoli.[1] But sucking large quantities of carbon monoxide into our lungs changes the playing field. Hemoglobin is a protein in red blood cells that transports a new supply of oxygen from the alveoli (air sacs) in our lungs to more than 50 trillion living cells throughout the body. One hemoglobin molecule can transport up to 4 oxygen molecules.

The problem is, when smoking, if both an oxygen molecule and a carbon monoxide molecule arrive at an air sac at the same time, the carbon monoxide molecule always wins and the oxygen molecule is always left behind.

The chemical attraction between carbon monoxide and hemoglobin is 200-250 times greater than with oxygen.[2] What's worse, once attached to hemoglobin, carbon monoxide's long chemical bloodstream half-life of 2 to 6.5 hours[3] prevents red blood cells from transporting oxygen.

Think about that last puff. One-half of the carbon monoxide it contained will still be circulating inside your bloodstream roughly four hours later. Is it any wonder that our heart and body rebelled when we attempted vigorous exercise, even hours after smoking?

We don't just deprive our heart and muscles of oxygen. We daily paint our lungs with the 4,000 chemicals that the tobacco industry collectively refers to as tar. It's too little oxygen and too much gunk.

While comforting to think that most of the toxins in the smoke that we sucked into our lungs were exhaled, it just isn't so. Ninety-seven percent of NNN (possibly the most potent lung cancer-causing chemical of all) is not exhaled but remains inside.

It's the same absorption rate as nicotine. Ninety-seven percent of inhaled nicotine isn't exhaled.[4] Imagine traveling through life with lungs so marinated and caked in toxic tars that it appreciably diminishes lung function.

What would it be like to allow nearly destroyed bronchial tube sweeper brooms, our cilia, to re-grow and begin the process of sweeping gunk from air passages? Imagine allowing all still functioning air sacs time to clean and heal.

What would it be like to experience a substantial increase in overall lung function? Imagine gifting yourself the ability to build cardiovascular endurance again, to have nearly all hemoglobin transporting life-giving oxygen.

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Forgotten Sensitivities

Where is the real neurochemical you? Is it normal to administer a stimulant that makes the heart pound 17 beats per minute faster when trying to relax?

Is it normal to use an external chemical to induce a dopamine "aaah" wanting relief sensation upon hearing that a friend has been hurt or a loved one has died?

Our dependency robs us of our emotional self-identity and sensitivities. The millions of extra acetylcholine receptors it grew inside our brain not only created a barrier to feeling nicotine's full effects but an insensitivity to life itself.

It isn't that the basic person and personality underlying nicotine dependency is radically different. It's that their addiction has disrupted their sensitivities, and has the wrong chemicals flowing at the wrong times.

Aside from dopamine, nicotine has command and control of serotonin, our stress-busting neurotransmitter, with ties to mood, impulse control, anger, and depression.[1]

Included among the estimated 200 neurochemicals that nicotine controls, mediates or regulates are acetylcholine, arginine vasopressin,[2] GABA,[3] glucose,[4] glutamate,[5] neuropeptide S,[6] anti-apoptotic XIAP,[7] epinephrine and nor-epinephrine.

What is it like to navigate nicotine dependency recovery, arrive home and for the first time in a long time allow life, not nicotine, to decide which neurochemicals your awareness will sense?

Forgotten Senses

Some nicotine users claim to smoke, vape, dip or chew for the flavor or aroma. If you haven't heard others say it, you've certainly seen industry marketing suggest it. Truth is, powerful toxins rob tobacco users of the ability to accurately smell and taste.

I used to barely get through the bank door to make the daily deposit when one cashier, without looking up, would say, "Hi John!"

One day I made the mistake of asking how she knew it was me. "When the door closes behind you," she said, "a rush of air that smells like smoke announces your arrival." It hurt. I didn't know whether to change banks or brands.

Sensory nerve endings in the mouth and nasal passages begin healing within three days of ending tobacco use. Will everything smell and taste better? No. As Joel puts it, you smell and taste everything more accurately, but that does not necessarily mean better.

As Joel notes, that first spring will bring the aroma of flowers that will likely be far more intense than you perceived while smoking. But wait until you drive by a garbage dump or sewage treatment plant.

The same is true of taste. With an accurate sense of taste, there may be flavors you thought you liked that no longer appeal to you, or foods you were convinced were horrible that suddenly become wonderful.

What is it like to smell coffee brewing more than a hundred feet away? Imagine being able to identify every smoker you meet by the thousands of chemicals coating their hair, skin, and clothing.

Flour isn't just white and rain just wet. They both offer subtle yet distinct aroma experiences.

Think about having missed out on the natural smell of those you love, the smell of a new baby, the aromas that tease as we walk past a bakery, or feeling compelled to stop and smell every flower as if planted just for you.

What is it like to live with healed senses? "Come to where the flavor is." Come home to you!

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Forgotten Mealtime

I almost never ate breakfast and usually skipped lunch. However, that's not entirely correct. You see, nicotine was my spoon.

With each puff, nicotine activated my body's fight or flight response, which would almost instantly dump stored fats and sugars (glucose) from my liver into my bloodstream.

I'd normally eat just one large meal at the end of each day. Part of that meal was stored and the next day I'd use nicotine to release it.

The consequences of torturing our body this way were many, including a 44% increase in the risk of developing type II diabetes (29% for light smokers and 61% for heavy smokers of more than 20 cigarettes per day).[1]

I had long ago forgotten how to properly fuel my body. Smoking 60 cigarettes per day, about one every 15 minutes, I had few hunger cravings and little experience satisfying them.

I repeatedly tried to navigate early recovery without awareness that nicotine had become my spoon. Not only did I endure nicotine cravings, I added hunger cravings. I endured a number of hypoglycemic-type symptoms including mind-fog and an inability to concentrate.

An utter mess, I tried eating my way out of food cravings. It made recovery vastly more challenging. The result was always the same: needless cravings, anxieties, extra pounds, relapse and failure.

But back to our theme, what was it like to feed yourself, to fuel your body on a regular basis, to sit with friends and eat like a normal person?

What would it be like to no longer make excuses for leaving meals early to replenish missing nicotine, to stay and comfortably savor the after dinner conversation instead of listening to your addiction?

Extra Workweeks

A 12 cigarette per day smoker who spends an average of 5 minutes per cigarette devotes one hour per day to smoking. That's 365 smoking hours per year. Broken down into 40-hour work weeks, that's 9 full work weeks per year spent servicing their addiction.

Even while spitting, oral tobacco users easily blend in and hide where bellowing smoke, or even vapor, cannot.

Usually they need fewer nicotine fixes, each delivering substantially more nicotine than inhaled from a cigarette or e-cig. But honest calculation of the total time spent each day servicing the oral user's addiction may be as much or more than for smokers or e-cig users.

Time spent locating a spit container, your tin, can, pouch, bag or box, tapping the lid, packing the can, or opening the package, sniffing or otherwise packing or loading up, working the dip, wad, pouch, orb, strip, gum, or lozenge, sucking or chewing while waiting for nicotine to slowly penetrate mouth tissues and enter the bloodstream as anxieties gradually build, spitting or swallowing juices, parking periods, and disposing of spit, used tobacco, or gum, it all adds up.

Imagine giving yourself a two-month vacation from work each year. What would it be like to reclaim such a massive chunk of life? What would it be like for your days to entirely be yours again?

What if your mouth, hands, and time were again yours without precondition? Where would you go, what would you do, how long would you stay, and who would you become if not chained to mandatory feedings?

Forgotten Priorities, Forsaken Life

It is entirely normal for drug addicts to truly and deeply believe that drug use enhances life, that it punctuates rather than interrupts it. Rarely did we stop and reflect upon the realities of captivity and full price of bondage.

Nicotine's two-hour elimination half-life in human blood serum is a feeding clock without feeling or conscience. It cannot respect life, time or priorities. When nicotine reserves and tonic dopamine begin falling, it will not matter if the moment being interrupted is the most wonderful of our entire day, year, or life.

The mind's survival instincts motivator is captive to nicotine. The lesson this circuitry's design now compels it to vividly and firmly implant within our brain is that nicotine use is core to survival, as important as food.

In fact, nicotine use becomes more frequent and trumps eating instincts. Part of our body's fight or flight response is to shut down digestion, so as to divert more blood to large muscles.

Any activity lasting longer than the time we could comfortably go between nicotine feedings became a sacrificial lamb. Where might we have gone, what might we have done and whom might we have met? What learning was missed?

Chemical dependency onset did more than simply modify our core survival instincts. It became elevated above family, friends, food, work, accomplishment, romance, love and concentration.

You'd think we would have immediately questioned such a massive shift in priorities. How could we not notice the amount of time devoted to nicotine and its impact upon our senses, sensitivities, relaxation, crisis management, meals and moods?

We didn't notice because nicotine had our focus diverted elsewhere. All we could think about was that next fix, satisfying that next urge, and feeling nicotine-normal again.

Once brave enough to venture beyond nicotine's influence, hidden truths become obvious. "Real choice" gets introduced into the equation. We become the jailer, and our dependency the inmate.

Once home, the full flavor of life can be savored and celebrated. What's there to lose by coming home for a visit? And there's just one rule to arriving ... none today.

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Freedom from Nicotine – The Journey Home

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**.

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