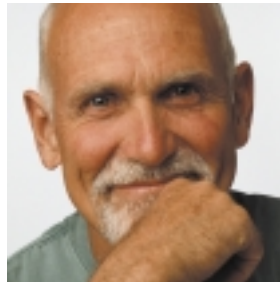




FOREVER  
*FREE*<sup>™</sup>

A Guide  
To Remaining  
Smoke Free



Smoking  
Urges

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*This is the second booklet in the Forever Free series. The first booklet was an overview of important information about staying off of cigarettes. This booklet covers smoking urges in more detail.*

## What are Urges?

Urges. Cravings. Desires. These are all words that smokers and ex-smokers use to describe how they feel when they want a cigarette. To some people, each word means something a little bit different. For example, some smokers say that a “craving” is much stronger than an “urge.” However, to most people, the words mean pretty much the same thing. In this booklet, we will use all three words to mean the same thing.

## Different Types of Urges

There are at least three kinds of cigarette urges that ex-smokers have:

1. nicotine withdrawal urges
2. habit urges
3. memories of smoking

### 1. Nicotine Withdrawal Urges

Over your years of smoking, your body adjusted to the nicotine. Many of your organs made changes to get used to the effects of nicotine. These include your brain and your heart. These changes let you smoke without feeling all the effects of nicotine that you felt when you first started smoking. For example, after years of smoking you probably did not feel lightheaded after a cigarette. Your pulse no longer raced as fast.

But, when you quit smoking your body adjusted again. This time it had to adjust to **not** getting nicotine. Your brain, heart, and other organs now had to get used to you not smoking! This change can be unpleasant and is called nicotine withdrawal. The symptoms of nicotine withdrawal include:

- lightheadedness
- sleep problems
- decreased heart rate
- craving for cigarettes
- increased appetite
- difficulty thinking
- headache
- nausea (sick to your stomach)
- depression (feeling sad)
- irritability
- anxiety (feeling tense)
- constipation

Most people do not have all of these symptoms, but they do have some. Nicotine withdrawal begins about 20 minutes after your last cigarette. If you do not smoke, it lasts between one and two weeks. There are three ways to stop these unpleasant symptoms:

1. Wait for it to end on its own after one or two weeks.

**OR**

2. Use nicotine replacement products such as nicotine gum or patch, or use Zyban.™

**OR**

3. Smoke a cigarette.

The first two ways are, of course, how someone quits smoking. But it is very tempting to get relief the third way—by smoking a cigarette. This temptation is the “nicotine withdrawal urge.” Smokers get this urge when the nicotine from their last cigarette clears their brain—about 20 minutes after smoking.

### Why do most smokers say that their strongest craving for a cigarette is first thing in the morning?

It is because their body has been without nicotine for eight hours while they were sleeping.

### How long do ex-smokers have nicotine withdrawal urges?

As long as nicotine withdrawal lasts. This is about one to two weeks after quitting smoking. Often a smoker tries to quit but does not *completely* quit smoking. He or she may have one or two cigarettes per day to deal with urges. This “cheating” just makes nicotine withdrawal longer. The “quick fix” actually causes more problems.

### What does a nicotine withdrawal urge feel like?

If you are an ex-smoker, you may remember the feeling very well from your first week of quitting. Urges are hard to describe, but many ex-smokers say that this type of urge feels physical. This makes sense, since it occurs in response to physical changes in your body.

One ex-smoker told us that these urges felt like “a stone was in my chest.” This is a good way to describe the feeling.

## 2. Habit Urges

Many ex-smokers have quit for long enough that they no longer have nicotine withdrawal urges. Habit urges, on the other hand, may keep being a problem for them.

Habit urges occur when an ex-smoker is in a situation that had been tied to smoking for that person. Here are some examples of habit urges:

\*\*\*\*\*

- a. *Mary always smoked while talking on the telephone. Whenever the phone rang, she would reach for her pack and light a cigarette. Now she has quit smoking for three weeks. But whenever she hears that ring of the telephone she still wants to smoke.*

\*\*\*\*\*

- b. *Scott was a bowler. Bowling and smoking used to go together like ham and eggs for him. While he was trying to quit smoking, Scott wisely avoided the bowling alley for three weeks. Now that he feels that he has cigarettes kicked, he has started bowling again. To his surprise, the first night of bowling caused cravings for cigarettes. And seeing all of his buddies smoking only seemed to make it worse.*

\*\*\*\*\*

- c. *Jestene and her sister started smoking together as teens. Although they now live 500 miles apart, whenever they get back together they tend to smoke cigarettes while catching up with one another. Jestene has grown to value the special times that she has with her sister once or twice a year. There is a strong sister bond between them at these times. Since their last visit, Jestene has quit smoking. She has not smoked for five months now, and she has had very little desire to smoke. However, when she and her sister sat down at the kitchen table and began to talk about their kids, Jestene's sister pulled out her pack and offered Jestene a cigarette. Jestene had a strong urge to smoke. Smoking seemed like the thing to do.*

\*\*\*\*\*

- d. *Peter had been smoke-free for nearly a year, and he was proud of it. Last week, while driving his daughter to soccer practice, he was rear-ended by a drunk driver. He was not hurt, but his daughter broke both her legs. One person at the scene of the accident was smoking, and Peter felt that he too needed a cigarette to deal with the stress.*

These four stories were told to us by former smokers. In each case, something from the past set off the urge to smoke. For Mary, it was the telephone. For Scott it was bowling. For Jestene it was her sister. And for Peter it was stress. The things that set off these urges are called “triggers.” The triggers can be people, places, things, and even moods.

**Here is a list of some common triggers for habit urges:**

- talking on the phone
- driving a car
- seeing cigarettes or someone smoking
- being with an old smoking buddy
- having a fight with family
- feeling bored
- celebrating
- finishing a job
- eating
- drinking coffee
- feeling angry, sad or nervous
- feeling **STRESSED**
- feeling lonely
- trying to solve a problem
- drinking alcohol



As you can see, a lot of different things can cause habit urges. The good news is that you will not have habit urges forever. The longer you go without smoking, the fewer urges you will have. If you have a strong urge months after quitting, it may be because you are in a situation that you had not been in since quitting. After you get through that situation *without smoking* the urges will get easier, until they go away. This process is clear from the following story told by one of our clients:

*Bill had his last cigarette over two months ago. He and his family were planning on eating out at Bill’s favorite diner. The diner used to be a hang-out for Bill and his buddies. The diner just went “no smoking,” and it was Bill’s first time there since he had quit smoking. During the hour-long dinner, Bill had a strong craving for cigarettes. He told himself that he did not want to start smoking again. He made it through the meal without having a cigarette. It seemed like the longest hour of his life. However, on his next visit to the diner, Bill was very surprised to find that he was not bothered by smoking urges at all!*

In Bill’s case, being at his favorite diner was a trigger for him. The first time he visited there since quitting, he had strong urges. But because he did not give in to the urges, the next time he ate there he did not have any problem with urges. In most cases urges do not completely go away after only one time with a trigger situation. But after many times, the urges will go away.

The other type of trigger that can cause strong urges long after quitting is **STRESS**. Most smokers deal with stress by having a cigarette. So, after you quit smoking, it is common to want a cigarette when you're feeling stressed.

*Pat had not smoked in 8 months, and she rarely had any desire to smoke. However, today at work her supervisor told her that the company would be laying off 50% of its workers. Half the people in Pat's department would be getting pink slips next week. The supervisor did not know who would stay and who would be let go. Jobs were hard to find, and Pat was very concerned about losing her job. The first day after hearing the news, she had strong urges to smoke. She found herself thinking, "Who cares if I start smoking again? That's nothing like not having a job!" But, she did not smoke, and by the third day the urges were gone, even though she was still stressed.*

Pat did get laid off. But even then, she did not start smoking again. Pat's story also shows how, in times of stress, people often feel that staying off cigarettes is not as important as the current problem. When a loved-one dies you might feel that you need a cigarette to cope, and you do not really care if you start smoking again. However, those people who start smoking because of stress may regret it once the stressful event passes.

*Joe had been a fire fighter for 23 years. One day he had an accident on the job, and he was paralyzed below the waist. He could not keep doing his work, and he depended on others for nearly everything. He no longer cared if he got cancer or heart disease, and he started smoking again. Six months later, once the shock of his accident slowly faded, he was sorry he started smoking. "It was bad enough being a man in a wheelchair," he said, "but now I am a smoker in a wheelchair. That's two strikes against me. Besides, now I want to live!" He signed up for quit smoking classes and was able to quit again.*

It is important to note that good moods can also trigger habit urges. You may have smoked cigarettes when you were feeling good or when something good happened. When this happens after you quit, you may have urges to smoke. We know people who started smoking again when they were having a good time, like at a wedding.

Remember, habit urges occur when you are in a situation that is tied to smoking for you. The urges will get easier if you get through the situation without smoking.

### 3. Memories of Smoking

You probably smoked for many, many years. You lived much of your life as a smoker. If you smoked a pack per day, you took about 70,000 puffs on cigarettes each year. There are few things that you have done as many times, besides breathing. Therefore, you will have memories of smoking. You may see someone smoking and recall that you used to do that. Other things may trigger memories of when you were a smoker—an old song, a certain food, old friends, etc. Each ex-smoker has memories about smoking. Sometimes they come on fast. Sometimes there is an urge when a smoking memory occurs. But the urge is so mild, that the smoker can deal with it. People who quit smoking many years ago sometimes say that they still have urges to smoke. They are mostly talking about memories they have from when they were smokers.

## How to Deal with Urges to Smoke

There are three key ways to deal with smoking urges without smoking.

**They are:**

1. **Think ahead**
2. **Prepare for the urge**
3. **Cope with the urge**

### Think Ahead

Most recent ex-smokers know the types of situations that are hard for them. These are the kinds of situations listed on page 5. If you can plan ahead for these, you will be able to prepare for them. For example, before going to a wedding, you can tell yourself that the reception may cause urges to smoke. Or, if you have a stressful event coming up—a day in court, perhaps—you can tell yourself that you may crave a cigarette. If you used to smoke at baseball games, and the first game since you quit smoking is next week, you can think ahead that you might want to smoke.

### Prepare For the Urge

Thinking ahead is only part of the solution. You also need to prepare for it. Think about what you will do if you do indeed have urges when the situation arrives. Will you be able to leave the situation? Can you have some candy to eat, or a carrot stick to chew until the urge passes? What can you tell yourself in the situation that will help you get through it? If you think of these things ahead of time, you will be more likely to use them when the time comes.



## Cope With the Urge

This is the real key. Coping skills are the things that you do or tell yourself in order to get your mind off cigarettes. Research shows that people who use coping skills are much more likely to stay quit than people who do not. People who rely upon “willpower” tend to start smoking again. There are two types of coping skills that you can use: behavioral and mental.

**Behavioral coping skills** are things that you can do... actions that you take. Here is a list:

- Leave the situation.
- Call or talk to a friend who will listen.
- Exercise.
- Take deep breaths.
- Have a drink of water.
- Eat or chew on something (gum, candy, vegetables).
- Do a relaxation exercise.
- Keep your hands busy—play cards, sew, write.
- Take a shower.
- Do something with a non-smoker.
- Do something else, like read, write, or listen to music.

**Mental coping skills** are things that you can tell yourself. Here is a list:

- Remind yourself of the reasons you wanted to quit.
- Think of how long you have been cigarette free. You do not want to start over again.
- Think of how you got through this situation in the past without smoking.
- Try to figure out what is making you want a cigarette now.
- Tell yourself that smoking will not solve any problem. It will only create new ones.
- Surf the urge. Imagine the urge is a wave that builds up, then breaks. Imagine you are a surfer riding the urge wave, rather than being “wiped out” by it.
- Think of how your health is improving because you quit smoking.
- Tell yourself that *smoking is not an option*.

That last mental coping skill is the all-time favorite of our smoking clients. They say that telling themselves, “Smoking is not an option,” is simple and works well for them. Anything *else* may be an option, but not smoking!

You may like some of these coping skills better than others. That’s OK. It really does not matter much which skills you use, as long as you do **something** when you have an urge to smoke. Some research shows that it is best to use both behavioral and mental coping skills when you have an urge.

There is one thing you want to avoid doing when you have an urge. You do not want to beat yourself up. Ex-smokers who tell themselves “I am so weak,” or “I was so stupid to ever smoke,” tend to start smoking again. Your coping skills should be positive, not negative.

### Helpful Hint:

If you ever slip and have a cigarette, you can use these coping skills to avoid smoking any more. (More on this in an upcoming *Forever Free* booklet.)

## When Will the Urges End?

Nicotine withdrawal urges usually last only one or two weeks if you don’t smoke. Habit urges slowly go away as you have different situations without smoking. However, new situations or a lot of stress can still trigger urges. Most people who have quit for a year or more rarely have habit urges. You may always have memories of smoking. Some of these will be pleasant memories, but most ex-smokers do not feel strong urges to smoke while having these memories.

**Think Ahead...Prepare...and Cope will get you  
through even the worst urges to smoke.**

## Exercises

- I. Try to think ahead about the **triggers** (people, places, things or moods) that might cause you to have urges to smoke. How many can you list? Write down what might cause you to have an urge to smoke.

- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_

- II. List 5 **behavioral coping skills**. These are things that you can do when you have an urge to smoke.

- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_

**III.** Now list **5 mental coping skills**. These are things that you can tell yourself when you have an urge to smoke.

- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ \_\_\_\_\_

It is a good idea to read these lists often. Add items or make changes. It will help keep you prepared to fight urges to smoke.

## Remember...



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