



Nicotine Craving and Withdrawal Symptoms

Once the brain gets used to a daily dose of nicotine, it seems abnormal when it stops getting it. So when a person stops smoking, physical and emotional withdrawal symptoms occur. Nicotine withdrawal symptoms vary from person to person, but may include:

- irritability
- restlessness
- anxiety
- increased aggressive thoughts and behavior
- depression
- decreased ability to tolerate stress or disruption
- decreased sexual drive
- intense tobacco cravings
- impaired work performance
- increased coughing and sputum production
- sweating
- fatigue
- muscle aches and cramps
- constipation or diarrhea
- headache
- sleep disturbances
- weight gain
- nausea
- increased appetite, especially for carbohydrates and sweets

Mood Swings and Depression

When an addicted smoker smokes a cigarette, he feels better because the withdrawal symptoms go away. When he does not smoke, he feels bad again. Attempts to quit often lead to mood swings and decreased pleasure. People who have depressive symptoms are more likely to experience mood disturbances when they try to quit. It also appears as if smoking may mask depression in some smokers.

Craving

Smokers who are trying to quit remember their smoking and the good feelings it produced. Studies have shown that when an addicted smoker stops smoking, the memory of the “high” associated with smoking is very strong.

Such memories decrease over time but can be triggered by certain sights and events. Simply seeing others smoke on television or movies can trigger a tremendous urge to smoke—even after long periods of abstinence. In fact, many ex-smokers have described pleasure and craving from simply playing with their lighters.

Craving causes smokers to become anxious, narrowly focused and obsessed with smoking. Without support from friends or family, it is likely that a person will return to smoking.

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