

STRESS MANAGEMENT



Like many people, you may feel that smoking a cigarette helps you to beat stress.

You may be surprised to find out that the nicotine in cigarettes is actually a stimulant that makes your heart beat faster and increases your blood pressure!

So, why do many smokers feel more calm and relaxed when they smoke? This is caused by a combination of three things:

- If you are a smoker, your body is “used to” a certain amount of nicotine. When your nicotine level drops below that amount, you feel uncomfortable. Then, when you put more nicotine into your body, you “feel better” — not because your problems are gone, but simply because nicotine is back in your bloodstream.
- If you are a smoker, you have probably smoked a cigarette so many times during stressful situations that you now connect the “feeling better” that nicotine brings about with feeling more relaxed and in control of your problems. You have actually trained yourself to believe that smoking a cigarette helps to make you calm and in-control.
- Each time you inhale while smoking a cigarette, you are taking deep slow breaths. Deep breathing in this way, with *or without* a cigarette, actually does help calm you.

So, as you smoke a cigarette, you breathe deeply and bring the nicotine level in your body back up to a certain level. You get a feeling that you are more relaxed, and you think that the cigarette has done this for you.

It is understandable that you are concerned that, by quitting smoking, you will lose your “relaxation tool” and will be overcome by stress.

But it is very important to understand that **YOU, NOT THE CIGARETTE**, have always been the one doing the calming and relaxing! A cigarette does not contain any ingredient that can relax you. It cannot pay your bills, make the traffic go any faster, or help you deal with your boss.

Smoking a cigarette has simply been your way of “setting the stage” for relaxing yourself and coping with stress. As you focus on quitting smoking, you simply need to find new ways to set the stage for relaxation and stress management. There are so many ways to do this!

And while you are at it, why not reduce the number of stressful situations in your life at the same time? You’ll find yourself enjoying your new smoke-free life even more!

The suggestions on the next pages give you some new ways to reduce stress and to deal with stressful situations in a healthy manner. *Give them a try!*

REMEMBER:

A cigarette is only paper and dried-up leaves. It is not a magic wand! A cigarette has never solved your problems — you have done that yourself, and you can continue to do so without cigarettes.

REDUCING THE STRESS IN YOUR LIFE

- Be sure to eat right, get plenty of sleep, and take part in some kind of exercise. If you do not exercise now, walking twenty minutes a day would be a good place to start. Talk with your doctor before beginning any exercise program.
- Focus on the good things in your life! Make a list of all the good things you have now. Look at the list when you become angry or upset.

THESE THINGS MAKE MY LIFE GOOD!

- Learn to accept the things that you cannot change. Try to take one day at a time.
- If possible, put off any especially stressful tasks that you are facing until you have been smoke-free for several weeks.
- Set aside relaxation time each day. Purchase a relaxation or meditation tape or video; listen to music.

STRESS HAPPENS...AND YOU CAN HANDLE IT!

- Write down the three things that cause the most stress in your life. Below each one, list some of the different ways you could handle it. Then decide which choice would be best, and place a check mark next to it. Be prepared to use this choice the next time you are faced with the stressful situation.

1. _____

Handle by: _____

2. _____

Handle by: _____

3. _____

Handle by: _____

- Practice deep breathing throughout the day, especially during stressful times. Use a cinnamon stick or a straw, if you wish, to help draw in the air.
- Close your eyes and practice seeing yourself successfully handling a stressful situation without a cigarette. Make the picture as real as possible.
- Talk about stressful situations with friends or loved ones, to get suggestions from them about dealing with the problem at hand. Talk with a clergyman or a counselor if you feel it is necessary.
- Remind yourself that every problem has a solution *that does not involve smoking*.