

Medical Article

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This month we want to address an issue that affects a large part of the population: Cigarette Withdrawal. Nicotine in cigarettes, cigars and chewing tobacco is a potent tranquilizer which is much more addicting than Valium and other prescription tranquilizers. As a result there can be a lot of rebound anxiety when you stop. There are actually 2 kinds of withdrawal from nicotine. The first is a chemical withdrawal where all the anxiety chemicals that are blocked by nicotine are released suddenly on withdrawal. Genetically there are some patients in whom the chemical withdrawal from nicotine addiction can be worse than withdrawal from narcotics. The second kind of withdrawal is psychological withdrawal from the habit of holding something in your hand and mouth and the fear that you won't have a readily available non-prescription tranquilizer called nicotine to take when the stresses of life hit. Here are some strategies for coping with these problems:

With cigarettes, the first step to quitting is to psych yourself up by picturing how much better you will feel immediately with your energy when you get more oxygen. Long term the benefits of quitting cigarettes include adding more quality years to your life with lower risk of emphysema, osteoporosis, joint pain, heart attack, stroke, cancer and memory loss. Picture any of the older relatives and friends that you have known who have smoked and have been addicted with these cigarette-related problems. Try to cut back on your cigarette intake and when you do notice how much more energy you have and how much more you can do without becoming short of breath.

The second step is to set a quit date and try one of several options to block nicotine withdrawal. The over-the-counter Nicotine Patches are effective and can be started on your quit date. Two prescription items are available especially if you smoke over ½ packs a day. The first prescription is Wellbutrin, an anti-anxiety, anti-depressant which lowers the rebound anxiety from cigarette withdrawal but only after you are on it for over 2 weeks. It is a good idea to set a quit date for 2 weeks after starting Wellbutrin and cut down on cigarettes in preparation. The other prescription option is Chantix, a pill that is slightly more effective than the other options. Chantix takes about 2 weeks to work as well.

About one week after setting a quit date, it is a good idea to set up an appointment to discuss how you are doing. Even if you don't manage to quit for over 2 hours or set a quit date, you will have made great progress psychologically in your resolve to quit and we can discuss strategies to help you do better on the next quit date. Remember that you don't have to be perfect in quitting cigarettes the first time you try in order to succeed. Your doctor gets paid to help you as many times as necessary to help you with this serious addiction. Good Luck!