

[Tobacco's Deadly Grip](#)

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HEALTH

Tobacco's Deadly Grip

If you smoke, quit. All it takes is an unequivocal decision to do it and faith that it can be done.

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Let no one be fooled! tobacco smoking is directly related to human diseases such as lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema, bronchitis and many other maladies. There is probably no physician in the United States who is not convinced of this.

Directly inhaled smoking is called "mainstream " smoking. Inhalation of the smoke indirectly is called "sidestream " or "passive " smoking. Recent studies at the University of Utah show that women subjected to passive smoking for three hours a day were three times more likely to develop cancer of the cervix of the uterus than women who had no exposure to smoking at all. This was even more evident in women over 40 years of age.

Dr. A. Wesley Horton, researcher at Oregon Health Science University, has discovered a relationship between breast cancer and "passive " smoking. He also found that countries with high rates of lung cancer in men have high rates of breast cancer in non-smoking women.

Smoking is one of man's strongest addictions. It is a difficult habit to stop, because of its many aspects: the repetitive motion of the arm and hand, the oral satisfaction and the addiction of the nicotine itself. Then there are the social causes of the problem, the implied "macho " image for men and "liberated woman " image for

women. All of this grows insidiously as a habit. I know, because I once smoked.

The smoker who develops lung cancer always dies, and it is a most horrible death. Every smoker develops some degree of emphysema and bronchitis. Emphysema results from the loss of the tissues that make up the walls of the small air sacs of the lung. A healthy lung has thousands of these small air sacs. The smoker is eventually left with only a few large sacs, making it impossible to breathe adequately. The small tubes that connect these sacs become chronically inflamed and produce the well-known "smoker's cough." It is not unusual to see smokers struggling for breath, even to the point of needing constant oxygen. Even then, they cough so much their voice changes. The marked decrease in the absorption of prana weakens the entire body and spirit. This is especially detrimental for anyone following the spiritual path. In the practice of yoga and meditation, breath and pranayama (breath control) are of essential importance.

Smoking is addictive primarily because of a chemical dependency that occurs due to the nicotine content of tobacco. There are many substances added to the tobacco to make it more palatable and to exaggerate its basic oral pleasure. Also, smokers derive enjoyment from the ritual of smoking--reaching for a cigarette, tapping it to pack the tobacco, fumbling for matches or a lighter and finally lighting the tip of the cigarette so that it bursts into a smoldering flame that transforms into inhaled smoke. The smoker watches the smoke curl upward and perhaps blows smoke-rings. After a short time, the muscles get used to this ritual and the habit mind becomes comfortable with the routine. Soon enough, smoking becomes a tool for dealing with anxiety, uneasiness or emotional disturbance.

To better understand how this works, let us consider the subconscious portion of our mind. It is the animal-like part of ourselves that behaves much like a child. It wants what it wants, when it wants it, and it will act up unless its desires are satisfied. Consider a three-year-old child's behavior. He is like your subconscious mind, which makes no judgments and acts only as programmed. This subconscious mind makes giving up smoking very difficult.

We can clearly see that the first thing we need to do in order to give up the habit of smoking is to consciously decide to quit. This must be an unequivocal decision. The use of a Nicotine Patch is not advised, for this is an equivocation. Withdrawal symptoms will not be a problem if the subconscious is clearly impressed with the new program. A firm act of the will is the most decisive and effective tool.

The technique of "shouting it out " may help to convince the subconscious mind that a change is really wanted. Whenever you are alone (even driving a car), you can shout, "I have stopped smoking." Say it so loudly that the subconscious cannot help but hear and be convinced. If this is done several times a day, the message gets through. This technique also works to overcome other habits.

I advocate stopping all at once-- "cold turkey." It may help to set a goal in time so that, when that time comes and the goal has been successfully achieved, the instinctive nature can be rewarded with something special that it enjoys, like an outing or a taste-treat of some sort. The key is to live with confidence, as if this goal of stopping has already been accomplished in its fullness for all time. The message to the subconscious must always be "I have stopped smoking, " not "I am stopping, " or "I will stop."

A new habit ritual may be formulated to replace the old one, such as a program of regimented daily exercise, reading or meditation. This will help make the transition positive. It also assures continued success. Beware! In my own case, I had stopped smoking for three years but was again hooked when someone handed me a lit cigarette while my mind was occupied with a floor show. Unconsciously, I took a drag. There I was, right back at the beginning. I had to repeat the entire process all over again. Of course, it did not take long the second time around.

If you are a smoker, you should feel responsible to inform yourself of the real and unrelenting effects of this life-threatening habit. If necessary, obtain professional help in stopping. Realize that the on-going lack of health from smoking is even worse than a possible early death. It makes no difference how long one has smoked; quitters always win. It is a well-known fact that, even if one has smoked for many years and has developed heart disease and lung problems, dramatic benefits can be gained by quitting. If we realize the deadly effects of this habit, can we not give it up? For more information on the health risks of smoking, go to <http://www.cancer.org>

The late Dr. DevanandaTandavan was a nuclear physician and hospital staff president who specialized in alternative healing arts. His medical editorials were featured in Hinduism Today from 1988 to 1998.