

Mike Reeves-McMillan, Health and Personal Development Coach, presents...

How To Stop Smoking



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Introduction

Hi, I'm Mike Reeves-McMillan, Registered Hypnotherapist (NZ) and health coach. I help a lot of people who want to stop smoking, and the material in this ebook is based on what I tell them in my face-to-face sessions.



Of course, information by itself isn't going to enable you to stop smoking. You already have plenty of information about the health effects of smoking (it's written on the packets in most countries, after all). Yet you haven't stopped yet. Why not?

There are a few reasons, and I'll talk about them and address them as we go through this ebook. More importantly, though, I'll give you tools, tips and techniques which, if you apply them and stick with it, can make the difference you need to quit tobacco and overcome your cigarette smoking habit. Information about smoking and its effects and the benefits of giving up smoking is important, but motivation to quit smoking, tips for giving up smoking and strategies to stop smoking are vital if you're going to succeed.

This ebook is part of an online course I created called [Smokefree Life](#). The ebook is free, and you can distribute it however you like as long as you don't change it in any way or charge for it. The course costs a small amount of money, about the same as a couple of packs of cigarettes, and gives you a whole stack of extra resources to make giving up smoking easier. The Resources section at the back tells you what they are.

Smoking isn't just a behaviour. It's a set of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that cluster together and support each other. Part of what we'll be doing is challenging those feelings and thoughts so that you can start to shift the behaviours.

Some people smoke as a ritual, others have a smoking habit. In both cases, it's often a way of distracting themselves from their lives – a way that doesn't solve any of their problems and that causes them more problems.

Some people smoke to manage their stress and emotions. But a study in the UK showed that, on average, smokers were less happy and had a poorer quality of life than nonsmokers – and this improved after they gave up. Smoking also keeps your body stressed and keyed-up – it's a really bad way to manage stress. In fact, there is no problem so terrible that poisoning yourself is a good solution.

Finally, some people smoke because trying to quit smoking gives them distressing feelings, and they feel they can't push past that to get all the benefits and lose all the negatives.

This ebook is here to help you with that, so that you can quit smoking and not only feel good but also feel good about yourself.

How Nicotine Works

Right at the start I'd like to tell you a bit about how nicotine (the addictive ingredient in tobacco) works. I find when I tell people this it helps them to shift their thinking and understand why they've felt the way they have and why it is that they have found it hard to change.

Nicotine is made by the tobacco plant as an insecticide – it's how it protects itself from insects. The insects get poisoned when their nervous systems get overwhelmed. Now, humans are bigger than insects, so it takes a lot more nicotine to kill us (it is deadly in large enough quantities, but because it dissolves in water and passes out of the body very quickly, you wouldn't be able to get that amount of nicotine from smoking.)

It does still affect human nervous systems, though. When you smoke, the smoke that you breathe in hits the damp tissue in your lungs and gets absorbed into your bloodstream along with the oxygen you breathe in. Very soon afterwards, it reaches your brain. (Most of the really harmful chemicals in cigarettes are there to help the nicotine reach your brain faster and in greater quantities.)

In your brain, nicotine is very much the same shape as a chemical that belongs there (acetylcholine, if you're curious). That chemical slots into receptors in the brain like a key into a lock, and when it does it releases the chemical called dopamine.

Dopamine is at the root of every known addiction, because it's the "reward" or "compulsion" chemical. Some people say, "I don't even like cigarettes, but I still want one." This is because the feeling of "wanting" is produced by the dopamine system.

Effectively, then, nicotine is lying to your brain and telling it that it wants cigarettes. What's more, dopamine is involved in creating vivid memories, so you remember that wanting very clearly.

That's why people who aren't stupid or lazy or irrational or unmotivated still find it hard to stop using a substance – nicotine – that is delivered in a way that damages their health.

Just knowing that the wanting is a false signal can help you to ignore it.

If you want to know more about how nicotine works, [How Stuff Works](#) has a really good summary.

Health Effects of Smoking

I almost didn't put this section in, because everyone knows that smoking is bad for you, right? But I thought I'd give a brief summary of exactly how smoking affects your body, because a lot of people aren't really sure.

Smoking damages your **skin** – it's easy to recognise a smoker by their skin. This is partly because of the direct effect of the smoke on the outside of the skin, but more because any time there are poisons or toxins in your body, your skin is affected. Your skin is your largest body organ, and anything that's wrong with you will show up there. It's also one of the ways poisons leave your body.

Smoking damages your **lungs**, obviously, since that's how the nicotine gets into your body. (It also damages the throat and tongue on the way through.) Your lungs are very good at dealing with dust, smoke and other rubbish that you breathe in, and they have special immune mechanisms to take care of it. But if you're stressing those mechanisms all the time, they can break down, or even turn into cancers instead.

Smoking puts strain on your **liver and kidneys**, which are responsible for taking poisons out of the blood (in the case of the liver) and passing them out of the body (your kidneys).

Smoking damages your **blood vessels and your heart**. One of the effects of smoking is to boost your stress reaction (that's why you get a sense of focus when you have a smoke). That increases your heart rate and blood pressure, thickens your blood and narrows your blood vessels. All of this, repeated over many years, can cause a lot of damage. This can lead to heart attacks or strokes (damaging your brain).

Stop Smoking Benefits Timeline

The good news is that your body is very resilient and can usually recover from most of this damage eventually, once you stop smoking. Here's a timeline of how it recovers and the health benefits of stopping smoking (from the US Centers for Disease Control):

20 Minutes After Quitting: Your heart rate drops.

12 hours After Quitting: Carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal. (Carbon monoxide is one of the main poisons in car exhaust. It blocks your blood cells from carrying oxygen to the rest of your body.)

2 Weeks to 3 Months After Quitting: Your heart attack risk begins to drop. Your lung function begins to improve.

1 to 9 Months After Quitting: Your coughing and shortness of breath decrease.

1 Year After Quitting: Your *added* risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker.

5 Years After Quitting: Your stroke risk is reduced to that of a nonsmoker 5-15 years after quitting.

10 Years After Quitting: Your lung cancer death rate is about half that of a smoker. Your risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas decreases.

15 Years After Quitting: Your risk of coronary heart disease is back to that of a nonsmoker.

Even though some of these changes take a long time (good motivation to stay stopped!), one thing you will notice after you stop is that you have more energy. This is because your body isn't having to repair itself so much and filter out so many poisons. More energy is just one of the benefits of giving up smoking.

How to Quit Smoking Without Gaining Weight

While I'm talking about bodies, a lot of people are worried that they'll gain weight when they stop smoking. People do sometimes gain weight after they stop, but if you understand why and have some strategies to prevent it, you can stop smoking without gaining weight.

There are three main reasons people gain weight when they quit smoking.

1. The reason I mentioned in the section above – you're **no longer using so much energy** just to keep your body on a relatively even keel. The proteins you used to use to repair the damage get broken down for energy instead, and your body isn't having to strain to get rid of all the poison either. This means **you don't actually need to eat as much**.
2. Your body is used to a **blood sugar boost** from smoking, as it throws your body into stress mode. When you don't get the regular boost, something feels "wrong", and you compensate by eating something sweet. (It's not actually wrong, just different.)
3. Some people are so used to **having something in their mouths** that when they don't have cigarettes there, again something feels wrong.

There are several strategies you can use to quit smoking without gaining weight. Here are some suggestions:

1. Reduce the size of plate you use slightly, so you are eating less but it looks the same amount. (This really works.)
2. Eat fruit or carrot sticks. They are high in fiber, so they satisfy your stomach, and they give a slight blood sugar boost but not the big, harmful jump that a sugary snack will. They also contain vitamins and minerals to help your body repair itself from the smoking damage.
3. Chew sugar-free gum if you miss having something in your mouth.

Benefits of Giving Up Smoking

Keeping these stop-smoking benefits in mind will help you persevere in the process of giving up smoking. (Grateful acknowledgement to the US National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>).

1. **Health:** As mentioned above, your chances of having a heart attack, stroke, many kinds of cancer, and lung diseases start reducing when you stop smoking. You start to feel more alive (and there's a reason for that).
2. **Appearance** of your skin improves. Smoking makes you look older and turns your skin wrinkled and leathery.
3. **Smell** of your clothes, hair, breath, home, and car improves.
4. **Breathlessness** when climbing stairs and walking starts to go away.
5. **Coughing** in the morning reduces or disappears.
6. **Your children** will have fewer coughs, colds, and earaches and be less likely to smoke themselves.
7. **Sleep** is deeper and more refreshing when you don't smoke.
8. **Energy** won't be diverted to healing the damage from smoke.
9. **Money** is going up in smoke every day you are a smoker – think what else you could do with it!
10. **Control** of your life should belong to you, not nicotine. Get back your self-respect and self-confidence by kicking the habit.

10 Tips for Giving Up Smoking

Here are some tips to increase your motivation to quit smoking.

1. **Write down** the things you don't like about smoking and the benefits of giving up smoking. Carry it as a reminder.
2. **Write down your excuses** for smoking and then write down why they aren't true.
3. **Notice** the activities you associate with smoking and write down how you will break your routine so you aren't triggered. (More on this under How to Make a Plan.)
4. **Remove all tobacco** from your house, car, and wherever else you keep it. Don't replace it or "borrow" from other people.
5. **Designate smokefree areas** like your car, your house etc. Increase them until the world is a smokefree area for you.
6. **Imagine** yourself in a few years' time if you go on smoking – how unhealthy and unhappy you'll be. Then imagine what you could do instead if you were smokefree. (This is one of the motivational techniques I cover in the [Smokefree Life online course](#).)
7. **Get support** from friends and family to stop and stay stopped.
8. **Reward yourself** when you don't smoke. Your mind has been getting a false reward with each cigarette. Give yourself a real reward instead.
9. **Look for better ways** to deal with stress, anxiety and strong emotions. Deep breathing and exercise are good. (I'll talk more about this later too.)
10. **Get help** from your doctor, public health nurse, Cancer Society or other health groups.

Quit Smoking Withdrawal Symptoms

Over the first 1-2 weeks while your body adapts to not being poisoned, you may notice irritation, anxiety, depression, trouble concentrating, sleep difficulties, coughing, sore throat, constipation, or hunger as side effects of quitting smoking. These are also called “recovery effects”.

To deal with the side effects of giving up smoking:

1. **Breathe** deeply to help your lungs clean out.
2. **Drink** less coffee, tea and caffeinated soft drink, and more water and fruit juice. (Nicotine and caffeine interact, and when you're not smoking caffeine will have a stronger effect on you, so cut down a little.)
3. **Eat** fruit between meals and at the start of meals. Also try sugar-free gum, carrots or celery sticks.
4. **Move** around if you feel cravings, anxiety or anger. (I'll talk more about exercise later.)
5. **Do something with your hands** if you're restless. Knit, whittle, pray the rosary, put nuts on bolts, knead Play-Do.
6. **Change** your routine so that you don't fall into old habits. (See below under Making a Plan.)
7. **Notice** what's happening with your body, mind and emotions. Let the feelings come and then *let them go*. They will usually only last a few minutes. (I'll talk more about this in the Stress Management section.)
8. **Think** about your reasons for stopping.
9. **Talk or write** about how you feel. Putting feelings into words reduces their power.
10. **If you start again, stop again.** This is tremendously important, and I talk about it more at the end of this ebook.

These quitting smoking side effects will pass off in time – usually between a week and a month. After that it gets easier.

Dealing With Ambivalence (Wanting and Not Wanting)

Everyone who comes to me to stop smoking is in two minds about quitting. I know that, because if they only wanted to stop smoking they wouldn't have to come, and if they didn't want to stop smoking at all they wouldn't come to me for help.

Ambivalence is actually a good thing. It shows that you're thinking about both sides of the issue. If you're closing your eyes to the benefits of change and the costs of staying the same on the one hand, or the costs of change and the benefits of staying the same on the other hand, you're not being realistic.

But to move forward, you need to resolve your ambivalence. If you've bought my [Smokefree Life course](#), you should have got access to the audio track Integration. That track uses a true story as a hook to help the inner parts of yourself that have been resisting change “get with the programme” and join in the important work of becoming smokefree.

Listen to that track now, before you read on, to increase your motivation to quit smoking.

Strengthening Motivation

There are only four ways I know of to strengthen your motivation to quit smoking (or for any other change).

1. Increase your desire for the new situation. Think about all the benefits of giving up smoking. (I've listed them in the Benefits of Giving Up Smoking section above).
2. Reduce your barriers to change. Deal with what is preventing you from moving forward. (That's what this whole course is about.)
3. Become clearer on the drawbacks of remaining where you are. Realise that you actually won't remain where you are; things are going to get worse if you keep doing what you're doing.
4. Find ways to replace the benefits of your current situation with something that will help you move into the new situation. I give you an example on the Smokefree Life track which you can get from the downloads page if you've signed up for the [Smokefree Life online stop-smoking course](#).

I've created an exercise which combines several of these methods. I call it the **Marty McFly technique**, because it's a bit like the Back to the Future movies. You can find it on the downloads page for the course.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy and You

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) is controversial for some people. It involves giving yourself nicotine without smoking, so that it's easier to make the transition. The nicotine is given in patches you stick on your skin, in chewing gum or lozenges, or in an inhaler. The idea is that your brain is yelling out for nicotine and it's going to be easier to change the behavioural part of smoking if you can give it enough nicotine to shut it up a bit while you stop smoking.

You get less nicotine through NRT than you do through cigarettes. Even the large patches only give about 1mg per hour, and you can get around 7mg from a single cigarette. The patches are constant slow-release and ramp up slowly, while the gum and lozenges give you a quick "top-up". Some people use them together, which is fine.

Although nicotine is poisonous in large doses (larger than NRT or cigarettes give you), it is generally not thought to cause cancer – it's the other ingredients in the cigarettes that do that. Some scientists disagree and think it does contribute to cancer, but it is certainly less harmful getting it from NRT than from cigarettes.

There are philosophical arguments that oppose using nicotine in an attempt to stop being dependent on nicotine, but it can be seen as a way of cutting down while removing the toxic parts of the smoke from yourself and your environment.

Nicotine withdrawal symptoms include:

- Irritability
- Anger
- Moodiness
- Restlessness
- Tenseness
- Anxiety
- Hunger
- Weight gain
- Poor concentration
- Sleep disturbance

If you have these symptoms while on nicotine replacement therapy, the cause is **not** the NRT.

You need to increase your dose of nicotine by double-patching or using the gum, lozenges etc. more frequently.

If you experience nausea (feeling as if you are going to throw up), faintness or headaches while on NRT, this does mean you are taking too high a dose.

Cut down until you feel OK again.

Could NRT Help You?

I give a standard test to my clients who come to me to stop smoking, to assess whether they might benefit from NRT. (In New Zealand, the government subsidises NRT, and I'm a Quit Card provider, meaning that I can give what amounts to a prescription for my client to take to any pharmacy and they only pay a small fee to get it issued. Other countries do not have this scheme. If you are in New Zealand, many practice nurses, occupational health nurses or community health workers are Quit Card providers. Ask – it might save you some money.)

The standard test is called the Fagerstrom Test of Nicotine Dependency. If your score on the Fagerstrom is very low (under 3), NRT is unlikely to help you, but if it is 3 or above, and especially if it is very high, NRT is probably a good idea for you.

Here is the test. In the Score column, write down the number of points that is next to the best answer for you, and then add them up at the end.

	Questions	Answers	Points	Score
1.	How soon after you wake up do you smoke your first cigarette?	Within 5 minutes 6-30 minutes 31-60 minutes more than 1 hour	3 2 1 0	
2.	Do you find it hard not to smoke in places where smoking is not allowed?	Yes No	1 0	
3.	Which cigarette would you hate most to give up?	The first one in the morning Any other one	1 0	
4.	How many cigarettes a day do you smoke?	Less than 10 11-20 21-30 More than 31	0 1 2 3	
5.	Do you smoke more often during the first hours after you wake up than during the rest of the day?	Yes No	1 0	
6.	If you are so unwell that you are in bed most of the day, do you still smoke?	Yes No	1 0	
Total out of 10:				

Add up your scores. If your score is 3 out of 10 or more, look into getting some nicotine replacement therapy. According to some scientific studies, it can double your chances of success if used correctly.

See below for advice on using nicotine replacement products.

Using Nicotine Patches

Nicotine patches are available in different strengths.

The strength supplied depends on how much you usually smoke. It's usually a good idea to start with the strongest dose.

Decide where you want to wear the patch.

Choose a clean, dry area with no body hair, avoiding creams, lotions, oils or powder.

Cut the sachet and remove the patch. Don't cut the patches up.

Peel the backing and apply the sticky side to skin.

Press firmly for 10 seconds.

Change position each day. Wait three days before using the same area again.

It will take 1-2 hours for the effect to reach full strength. Gum and lozenges take a shorter time. If you find that the patches don't relieve your cravings quickly enough, consider using gum or lozenges as well.

Some people find that the patches irritate their skin. If this is worse than the nicotine withdrawal symptoms, stop using the patches.

Using Nicotine Gum

Nicotine gum is not used like ordinary chewing gum. When you feel the urge to smoke:

1. Chew one piece of gum until the taste becomes strong or peppery as nicotine is released.
2. Roll the gum and "park" it in your cheek.
3. When the taste fades, chew again to release the strong peppery flavour, and park again in your cheek.

You can repeat these steps for 30 minutes, 8-12 times per day.

As you need less nicotine you can cut the gum up and mix with ordinary chewing gum.

Some people find the taste of nicotine gum too unpleasant to persist with. If you find it worse than the nicotine withdrawal symptoms, stop using the gum.

Using Nicotine Lozenges

Lozenges work much the same as gum, but they are prescribed for people who have difficulty chewing or for other reasons prefer them to gum.

Do not suck the lozenge continuously like a throat lozenge. Do not bite or chew it.

1. Place one lozenge in the mouth between gums and cheek.
2. Suck slowly until the taste becomes strong.
3. Stop sucking until the taste fades, then suck again.
4. Occasionally move the lozenge from one side of the mouth to the other.

You can repeat these steps for 20-30 minutes, every 1-2 hours in the first six weeks, then gradually cutting down to one every 4-8 hours.

Some people find the taste of the lozenges unpleasant. If you find it worse than the nicotine withdrawal symptoms, stop using the lozenges.

Warnings for Gum and Lozenges

Keep all NRT products out of reach of children, and dispose of carefully.

Don't eat or drink for 15 minutes beforehand or while using lozenges or gum.

Nicotine can cause throat irritation and an increase in saliva at first.

Swallowing nicotine can cause irritation to the stomach or hiccupping. Try chewing or sucking more slowly if this is a problem.

Making a Quit Plan

Having a plan will help you. Apart from anything else, it makes you think about the changes you need to make in order to stop smoking successfully.

Some of the following is based on the website [Become an Ex](#). It's a good website, and helps you make an online plan. If you're on the computer a lot, consider signing up there. (They have an iPhone app and a mobile version as well, if you always have your smartphone with you.)

1. Track Your Triggers

For 3 days, each time you have a cigarette, pay attention to what you were doing or what was happening just before and how strongly you wanted it.

At the end of this process, you should have a clear idea of what triggers off your smoking.

- Is it being in a particular place?
- Is it a feeling?
- Is it something you eat or drink?
- Is it being around someone else?
- Is it a particular activity?

2. Learn Differently

The association of smoking with those triggers was a learning process. Separating them from the triggers is a learning process too.

BecomeAnEx suggests that you start by not smoking until a few minutes after you want to. Gradually extend the time. By doing this you are teaching yourself to separate the trigger from the smoking – because they really are two different things.

You may want to quit smoking right now, rather than delaying. But if delaying is going to work, and stopping suddenly isn't, which is better?

3. Get a Strategy

The triggers themselves are mostly still going to be there. Particular food and drink triggers you can get rid of temporarily, and I suggest you do that if you can. But your annoying boss is going to be annoying whether you smoke or not, and you're going to need a strategy to deal with that. (A strategy that doesn't involve smoking.)

Part of what I'm doing in the audio tracks in [Smokefree Life](#) is encouraging your mind to come up with its own strategies. But particularly for stress, there are some great strategies that are really simple. I talk about some of them in the Managing Stress section, and I have a whole free follow-up [online course on stress](#) that you can start any time you like.

I really suggest you go through that course, by the way. Most people who start smoking again after they stop

do so at a time of stress, because they hadn't found any other strategy that worked better than smoking. I got this email from a client a while back, and it made my day:

I picked up the cigarettes again when I separated from my partner but I am back on the smokefree horse and have gone back to some of the techniques you taught me and I am doing well again.

That's the way to do it! [Simple Stress Management Techniques](#).

4. Set a Quit Date

There will never be a stress-free time to quit tobacco. On the other hand, stopping smoking two weeks before the big project finishes, when you know you'll be working day and night, is not the smartest approach either.

Pick a time when you're going to be at an average level of stress for your life, whatever that is, and when you'll have some time and attention to give to the resources.

5. Assemble Your Resources

I've assembled a bunch of resources for you in the [quit smoking online course](#), but there are other resources out there among your friends and family and in the community. Find people who will help and support you, who will encourage you and cheer you on, who will check up on you. Find health groups that can give help and advice.

And don't forget the resources you already have in your own life and your own mind. You've succeeded at things before, and you can use that to encourage yourself.

6. Do It

When your chosen date comes, stop. Go hard out. Commit yourself wholeheartedly to being smokefree. Tell yourself, "I quit smoking right now."

Use all the resources and support.

7. Stick With It

Some people – about one in 20 – can just stop smoking, bang, and never smoke again. Most people find it harder than that. If it gets hard, think about all the things that make it worth it to you, all the "Benefits of Giving Up Smoking" on page 6.

I talk about stopping smoking as a personal development challenge. It's like doing a triathlon or climbing a mountain. You have to train for it, you have to get help, and it's not just about your health. It's about a great personal achievement that will leave you a stronger and more confident person. That's another great motivation to quit smoking.

And if you do start up again - see "Picking Yourself Up Again" on page 16.

Managing Stress: 3 Simple Tools

There is no stress-free path through life. That's actually a good thing. No stress means no challenge, and no challenge means you become bored, boring, and weak.

But there is certainly such a thing as too much stress, and all too many people experience that. I can't make your stress go away, but I can give you three great tools to handle it.

1. Happy Hands

"Happy Hands" is the name one of my stop-smoking clients gave to a technique that's officially known as "anchoring". One of the tracks that comes with my full [stop smoking online course](#) (Smokefree Life) talks you through the process, but here it is written down:

1. Sit somewhere you won't be disturbed or distracted, where you'll be comfortable and where you can relax. (Preferably somewhere you don't usually smoke – and, of course, don't smoke during the exercise!)
2. Close your eyes and gently relax your body. Think about a fine sunny day and a beautiful blue sky above you, or something else that helps you be peaceful and relaxed.
3. Now think about a memory of a time when you were really resourceful, when you were feeling in control, maybe when you'd just achieved something you were proud of. Make that memory as vivid as you can – hear what you heard, see what you saw, feel what you felt, fill your five senses with it. Turn up the volume and clarity.
4. Gently press your thumb against one of your fingers (any one) and associate that touch with the good positive feeling.
5. Let go of the memory and the finger press.

You may have to practice that a few times, but what it does is it gives you a way to retrieve that good, strong, resourceful feeling whenever you need it, just by pressing your thumb and fingers together. I use this technique whenever I'm really stressed, and it's great. So effective.

2. Relaxation Response

The Relaxation Response is the name that Dr Herbert Benson uses for a shift in the way your body and brain work. You can either be tensed up, with your body ready to fight or run away, or else you can be relaxed, with your body working on fixing itself up and healing itself and carrying on all the other important day-to-day tasks. You can't have both at once.

It's easy enough to switch over to relaxation mode, too. Here's one way that I've taught many of my clients. I use a version of it myself in the middle of the afternoon to perk myself up and give myself more energy.

1. Choose a word or short phrase as a focus. If you have religious or spiritual beliefs, you could use a name, word or phrase associated with those beliefs; if not, choose one which reflects important values to you, like "peace" or "compassion".
2. Find a quiet place and sit comfortably.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Progressively relax your muscles, either from head to foot or foot to head. Let your muscles relax, don't try to "make" them relax. Become aware of any tension in them, and allow that tension to release as if it was leaking out, becoming a mist and evaporating.
5. Breathe slowly and deeply, but without forcing, and say your focus word or phrase silently to yourself on each outbreath. Focus on the feeling of your breath going in and out below your navel,

as if you were breathing through your navel.

6. Thoughts will come to mind. Let them go past.
7. If you find you have followed a trail of thoughts away from your repetition, just gently let the thoughts go and return to your focus on the next breath.
8. Use a timer to signal you after 10 to 20 minutes.
9. When the timer goes off, let other thoughts gradually return for a minute or so, then open your eyes and sit for another minute before standing.
10. Practice once or twice daily. Good times are before breakfast and before dinner, but any time is fine.

3. Welcoming Practice

This is the third of the practices I regularly use myself to calm myself down in stressful situations. The "Happy Hands" is good for a quick calm-down when you're starting to talk yourself into being tense. The Relaxation Response is a good daily practice to lower your general levels of stress. The Welcoming Practice is for those moments when you feel really angry, or afraid, or sad.

The practice is very simple, and it's in three parts.

1. **Become aware of how the emotion feels** in your body. Is it hot or cold, tense or loose, rough or smooth? What colour would it have if it had a colour? What sound would it have if it made a sound? Take your time.
2. **Connect to that feeling and welcome it by name:** "Welcome, anger" (or whatever it is). This sounds strange, but what you're doing is acknowledging that the anger is there for a reason and that it's OK to feel it. You're not resisting it or pushing it away (but you're not letting it make your decisions for you, either.) Take your time.
3. **When it's ready to go, let it go.** If you follow steps 1 and 2 (you may have to swap between them a couple of times), quite soon the emotion should start to drain away. Just let it go. You've noticed the situation, so now you don't need the emotion to draw your attention to it or help you deal with it. Take your time.

Of course, if you're in a physically threatening situation, you do need the boost that emotion gives your body and mind. In this case it's fine to let the emotion flow and make you stronger, faster and better at noticing things. (If it's not doing that, though, take a few moments to let it go. It will only interfere with getting out of the situation.)

There's a lot more material like this in my [free Simple Stress Management Techniques course](#), including four more quick techniques of stress management, a whole ebook on how to get off the emotional hamster wheel where you keep ending up in the same bad place, four audio tracks, 5 videos, a checklist of 24 things you can do to improve your sleep, and emails which take you through the process a small step at a time. Do sign up, it's free and it's all good stuff: [Simple Stress Management Techniques](#).

Exercise: A Better Strategy for Stress Relief

Another great strategy for stress management, health, personal development, mood management and just about everything is exercise.

There haven't been a lot of studies done on exercise and addiction, but what research there is suggests that exercise is a powerful way to help you stop smoking for good.

There are a few reasons for this:

- 1. Exercise helps to normalise your brain chemistry and smooth out your moods.** You'll feel better on average and won't miss the cigarettes as much.
- 2. Exercise promotes good breathing.** Part of the hit you get from a cigarette is because you're pulling oxygen deeply into your lungs. Deep breathing is a good strategy to help cravings pass off.
- 3. Exercise is good for your body.** It stresses your body just a bit, enough to stimulate it to grow and strengthen but not enough to harm it (if you're doing the right exercise at the right intensity). This can help your body heal from the negative health effects of smoking.
- 4. Movement is a good distraction.** Especially early on in your process of becoming smokefree, moving around is a good way to distract your mind and body from cravings and other stop-smoking withdrawal symptoms.
- 5. Exercise gives you a better reward.** Nicotine fools the pleasure and reward mechanisms of your brain, but exercise stimulates them too, and replaces a false reward with a real one.

Besides all that, succeeding at one challenge helps give you confidence to succeed at another. Your goal of stopping smoking and your exercise goals can support each other.

Talk to your doctor before you take on more than mild exercise. (The doctor is unlikely to discourage you, but may have suggestions about what kind of exercise is most appropriate.) And talk to a local gym, personal trainer or health coach about your goals and a plan for achieving them.

Teaming Up: Getting a Group Together

Group support is one of the things that helps people stop smoking. Why not organise a group in your local area - or even on Facebook or some other website? (There was a recent study that suggested a social network group online did help people quit smoking.)

Here are some simple tips for a successful stop-smoking group.

- 1. Publicise it in the right places.** That might be flyers on lamp-posts, a community noticeboard, a website or in a publication like a local newspaper or newsletter. Think about where people like you who want to stop smoking are likely to see it. You don't need a big advertising budget – some community publications will publicise it for free if you make it an interesting story.
- 2. Be decisive.** If you're all wishy-washy and try to find out when people are free and what time suits them and where would be a good place and how should we run it, it'll never get off the ground. Decide on a time and place and format that suit you, and advertise that. Give people something definite to respond to.
- 3. Have a simple format.** If nothing is planned, people will sit around staring at each other uncomfortably. If everything is planned with a stopwatch, it'll be too much. Make sure you cover the basics: Everyone gets to talk (going round the circle), maybe you or someone else does a brief presentation (you can use any of the material in this ebook – tell them where you got it!), and there should be some social time before or after with basic refreshments available.
- 4. Make a safe space.** The group should be somewhere that people feel comfortable being honest if they're having a tough time (or if they're having a great time), without feeling that they're going to be put down or disrespected for whatever they're experiencing. Talking genuinely about how you feel is a great way of dealing with all kinds of emotions, and it brings a group together.
- 5. It's over when it's over.** It's a good idea to have a pre-announced period of time that the group will meet – every night for a week or two weeks, or every week for six or eight weeks, for example, depending on what kind of people you are targeting and how much time they have. You can always decide to extend it if it's going well and people want to keep meeting. But if nobody's coming any more or the group has served its purpose, let it finish.

Picking Yourself Up Again

Not everyone will tell you this, because they don't want to get you thinking about the possibility of "failure". But most people who successfully stop smoking need several goes at it (the average is about 5). Of course, the more and better your [stop-smoking resources](#), the better your chances of beating that average.

I have three more things to say about that.

- 1. There is no such thing as one cigarette.** One is too many and a thousand aren't enough. If you start smoking again, particularly within a couple of years, you reactivate all of the parts of your brain that like getting nicotine, and they will take charge of you again. You don't want that.
2. Having said that, **starting smoking again is not failure.** It's feedback. It's letting you know that there is still something you need to sort out in order to reach your goal of being smokefree. Learn from it, and don't be ashamed to go back and ask for more help from the people who helped you before. (Go and watch [the videos I made with my client Sarah James](#) if you want some inspiration.)
- 3. If you start again, stop again.** Treat it as a new beginning. Dive back into the resources you have, maybe try another method, get some extra help, but *beat it one way or another*.

Where I grew up, in the western part of Auckland, New Zealand, there are a lot of immigrant families from what is now Croatia. A lot of them have vineyards and orchards, and my father used to buy wine from a particular old fellow called Tony.

Now Tony used to always have a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, but one day Dad noticed that he didn't have one, and said something about it to him.

“Ya,” he said in his heavy accent. “Every morning, cough, cough, cough, think lungs come up. One day I look at cigarette packet and I say, *This basta’ boss or I boss?* Then I throw him in rubbish tin, never touch him again.”

Not everyone can quit smoking just like that. But I tell that story because of old Tony’s eloquent words of inspiration for everyone who wants to stop smoking. You have to ask yourself: **This basta’ boss or I boss?**

And don’t stop until you’ve beaten it.

Guide to Resources

I have a list of [stop-smoking resources](#) on my website. I won’t reproduce them here, because I update that list from time to time and it’s easier to keep it in just one place.

I also provide a set of resources as part of the [Smokefree Life online stop-smoking course](#). These are audio tracks to help you through the process of stopping smoking, to help you with motivation to quit smoking, stress management and the shifts in thinking you need to make when giving up smoking. They use simple self-hypnosis techniques to help you focus on your goals and give your energy to the things you really want to do.

I’m a trained and registered hypnotherapist, and I promise you that these tracks are safe and pleasant to listen to. They don’t enable me to “control” you (that’s a Hollywood myth), and you won’t end up doing anything harmful or embarrassing because you listen to them.

Here’s a summary of the tracks:

- **Integration:** Helps you to “pull yourself together” so that you don’t have one part of yourself resisting the change. Use this track early in the process, and whenever you feel yourself resisting.
- **Cable to the Future:** Helps to focus your mind on your stop-smoking goal and draw you towards it. Use this track if your motivation to quit smoking needs a boost.
- **Letting Go:** Helps you let go of your past behaviours, thoughts and feelings around smoking and replace them with new and better ones for the future. Use this track early on and as often as you need it.
- **Smokefree Life:** Helps to make the process of giving up smoking easier. Use this track every day until you feel free.
- **The Marty McFly Technique:** A motivational time tour that strengthens your motivation for change. Use this one as an alternative to Cable to the Future – try them both and use whichever you prefer.

If you already bought the course, you can [log on here](#) and pick up those tracks (you get a password when you sign up).

If you want to buy the stop-smoking course, get it here:

[Smokefree Life online course](#)

I price it deliberately low, at the price of a couple of packs of cigarettes or less, because I want to remove one more excuse for not doing it. I hope you’ll give it your best shot and rise to this great personal development challenge of giving up smoking.