

PERMISSION TO SMOKE:
A LOW-STRESS WAY TO
FREEDOM FROM TOBACCO ADDICTION

by

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This paper is dedicated to my oldest sister, Nina,
who died from complications of emphysema
caused by years of chain-smoking.
I miss her wisdom and her humor.

Disclaimer: This paper describes my own personal experience and how others might apply some of the techniques that worked for me when I gave up smoking. It is not my intention to serve as a replacement for anyone's common sense or the good advice of a licensed physician.

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INTRODUCTION

If you are a smoker, you can probably relate to at least one of the following statements:

- ◆ I want to quit smoking, but I don't believe I can.
- ◆ I've tried to quit smoking, but nothing seems to work.
- ◆ I've quit "cold turkey" a number of times, but I always eventually start up again.
- ◆ I know I should quit, but I just can't seem to do it.
- ◆ I did quit, but the longing for a cigarette was so strong that I started again.
- ◆ I live with someone who smokes and I can never quit unless they quit, too.
- ◆ I need to quit smoking for medical reasons and I haven't been able to.
- ◆ I think it's too late for me to quit smoking.
- ◆ I enjoy smoking and don't really want to quit, but I'd like to have more control over it.

This paper is not so much about quitting smoking as it is about freeing yourself from the addiction. It is not a scientific or medical work, but rather describes how you can apply a method I developed and used to gain control over my smoking and to eventually quit altogether. It outlines a gentle way to re-educate yourself to smoke when you choose to, if at all, rather than habitually smoking because you are driven to it by some force within you which you do not fully control.

I know that this method can work because I used it to overcome a 15-year, one-to-two-packs-a-day tobacco addiction. I have been free since 1983 (40 years ago now!) and I know I will never become addicted again, except in my nightmares. I never thought I could do it, but I did, to my own astonishment, and it feels really good to be free.

There is no time limit. It took me nearly three months to be able to say with certainty that I had conquered my addiction. You may need more or less time, since it is always up to you to decide when you are able to take on a new challenge. You decide how far you are ready to go with the program at any given point.

CHAPTER ONE

Some Thoughts on Addiction and Cure

It is well known that the nicotine in tobacco causes physical changes in the body and that regular smoking leads to physical dependence. If smoking were merely a physical addiction, though, wouldn't it be much easier to quit? One could simply stop, feel restless and irritable for two or three days, and be cured forever. Do you know anyone who has quit like that?

It is estimated that only approximately 20 percent of smokers succeed in kicking the habit (Merck). Even when there are strong medical reasons for quitting (e.g. emphysema, COPD) many people find it impossible to do so. I think the reason why so few smokers ever succeed in quitting is that it's very difficult to go "cold turkey" from the psychological part of the addiction. If you know any former smokers, you probably know at least a few who have told you that if they ever smoked even one cigarette it would be all over - they'd be smoking again. So are they really cured, or merely capable of exercising tremendous and continual self-control?

I knew that, for me, smoking was more than a physical addiction because whenever I felt anxious, worried, or frustrated I lit up a cigarette and smoking it made me feel better. If I had to think about a problem or concentrate on some task, smoking really seemed to help. How would I deal with feelings of anxiety and frustration if I tried to quit? How would I be able to concentrate? How would I be able to think anymore? And what would I do with my hands? I really felt I would be a scatterbrained nervous wreck without my cigarettes.

Having tried to quit several times and failed, I was aware of certain feelings associated with the effort and failure, primarily anxiety and guilt. Not smoking made me feel anxious which made me want to smoke which, if I gave in, made me feel guilty, which made me feel more anxious, which made me want to smoke more, which made me feel more guilty, on and on in a vicious circle.

It seems contradictory, but as a way of getting around the problem of anxiety and guilt while I was trying to quit, I gave myself permission to smoke as much as I wanted to as long as I didn't inhale the smoke. While I also did the other things described in this paper to help me quit, I believe that giving myself this qualified permission to smoke was the most important key to the freedom from addiction I now enjoy, and I still have this permission. For some years, on very rare occasions, I would indulge an urge to smoke a cigarette, but I always did so without inhaling, and it has now been more than 30 years since I felt such an urge. The urge vanished at some point, but if I would smoke today, still without inhaling, I have no fear of ever again becoming addicted. I know I can smoke, without inhaling, one or more cigarettes now or tomorrow or next year and never be addicted again. Do you know anyone who has quit who can say that?

It took only about two or three days to cure the physical part of my addiction when I learned to smoke without inhaling, but about three months to become psychologically free to the point where I no longer felt driven to smoke. It might have taken even longer to get to that point with this method, but I was really motivated to overcome my addiction. I found I enjoyed playing the games to break my habits and challenging myself to find new things to do without my cigarettes.

It is my belief that the process of quitting emotionally takes time. It is not something you should expect to be able to do overnight. So be patient and gentle with yourself while you're quitting and try to have fun. You will feel so good when you finally succeed!

CHAPTER TWO

Your Personal Pros and Cons

It is important to be as conscious as possible about all of your feelings about smoking and quitting, both positive and negative. Being aware of what you think and how you feel can help you be gentle with yourself as you move towards freedom.

You will need a few sheets of blank paper for the exercises in this chapter. The result of the work you do here will be four separate lists that you will use over the next months to change your thinking about smoking while you're working on changing your smoking behaviour.

Each final list should be labelled clearly at the top so that you can easily distinguish it from the others. It might be easiest to use the headings given. Feel free to add to your lists if you think of things you didn't include originally, and to use additional paper if any list extends beyond one page.

If you have a really good memory, you can do these exercises in your head. The important thing is that you spend some time thinking about all of these points and that you make the mental reviews of your mental lists as described.

List One: How I Benefit from Smoking

As a first step, it is good to try to identify what you think you gain from smoking. Make a list of all the ways that you think smoking helps you. Some of the things you write down may seem illogical or silly when you get them on paper, but don't be critical of your list while you're trying to put it together. Leave a small amount of writing space under each item.

Here is a sample list to give you an idea of what a list might look like:

- ◆ friendship with other smokers
- ◆ it helps me relax
- ◆ it calms my nerves when I am upset
- ◆ I feel more confident when I have a cigarette in my hand
- ◆ it keeps my weight down
- ◆ it helps me concentrate
- ◆ I feel sophisticated and glamorous when I smoke

When your list is complete, start with the first item on your list and write down underneath the item how you could achieve the benefit by some other means. If you can't think of an alternative way to achieve the benefit, go on to the next item. Continue until you have thought about every item on your list. Using the items from the above sample list, here is how your new list might look:

- ◆ friendship with other smokers

This benefit is independent of whether or not I smoke. I would probably have more friends among non-smokers if I quit.

- ◆ it helps me relax

Learn some relaxation techniques

- ◆ it calms my nerves when I am upset

Try breathing deeply when I am upset

- ◆ I feel more confident when I have a cigarette in my hand

Try holding other objects (e.g. pencil, pen, unlit cigarette)

- ◆ it keeps my weight down

Look into diet and exercise for weight control

- ◆ it helps me concentrate

Try deep breathing

- ◆ I feel sophisticated and glamorous when I smoke

Buy some new clothes with the money I save from smoking less or not smoking at all

Review this list at least once a week and try to incorporate into your daily life some of the alternative ways of achieving the benefits you get from smoking, e.g., work on breathing deeply when you feel anxious or upset instead of immediately lighting up a cigarette, open a savings account for the money you will save from smoking less, make some non-smoking friends and start spending non-smoking time with them.

List Two: How Smoking is Bad for Me

All of the lists are important, but this list is a critical one. Try to think of all the ways that smoking is bad for you personally. Start the list with "**Smoking is bad for me because:** ". Make every statement sound as bad as you possibly can. Use more than one page, if necessary. I'm sure you can easily add to the following sample list:

- ◆ other people find me offensive, dirty, and disgusting when I smoke
- ◆ it's a really unhealthy habit which has been proven to lead to cancer, heart disease, emphysema and other health problems
- ◆ it's expensive - I spend _____ per week on it, which adds up to _____ per year
- ◆ it's really dirty
- ◆ it smells really bad
- ◆ my hair smells bad
- ◆ my clothes smell bad
- ◆ my house/office smells bad
- ◆ cleaning ashtrays is disgusting
- ◆ it's unhealthy for the people and animals who live with me
- ◆ it's unhealthy for the people who work with me
- ◆ it's time consuming
- ◆ it stains my fingers and teeth
- ◆ people avoid me because I smoke
- ◆ it pollutes the air in my house/office/car
- ◆ it damages my lungs
- ◆ it reduces the amount of oxygen available to my body

When you have finished your list, number the items starting with the thing you think is the worst. Maybe for you the fact that it's unhealthy is the worst item, so put a "1" there. The next worst might be that it offends other people, so put a "2" there. Continue until you have numbered all the items

on the list. When you have finished, get a new piece of paper and at the top of the new page write "Smoking is bad for me because: ". Copy your list to the new page in the order of the numbers.

Keep or discard the first version of the list, but carry the ordered list around with you and read it to yourself every time you smoke a cigarette until you have memorized it. If your list is very long, just try to memorize as many items as you can. Once you have memorized your numbered list, you can mentally go over it every time you smoke and whenever you remember to when you're not smoking. If you are incapable of memorizing, type up your reordered list nicely, get it reduced to a convenient size (maybe to fit in your pack of cigarettes) and have it laminated.

The purpose of this exercise is not to make you feel guilty or anxious about smoking, but to subtly create an aversion to it within yourself by emphasizing negative aspects of smoking.

List Three: What I Fear Will Happen If I Don't Quit

This list is also very important, but may consist of only one or two items. It should be very personal to you - a list of one or more things that you genuinely fear could happen to you if you don't quit smoking. Here are some sample fears:

- ◆ I'm going to get cancer and die before my children are grown
- ◆ I'm going to get emphysema and be gasping for air for the rest of my life
- ◆ I'm going to get laryngeal cancer and never be able to speak or sing again.
- ◆ I'm afraid that I will die soon because I already have emphysema. It's too late for me.

Once you have identified your fear(s), take a new sheet of paper and on it rewrite your item(s) in a way similar to the following examples:

- ◆ I am afraid that if I don't quit smoking, I will get cancer and die before my children are grown.

I deserve to live. I deserve to see my children grown. My children need me. I can overcome my addiction to cigarette smoking.

- ◆ I am afraid that if I don't quit smoking, I will get emphysema and be gasping for air for the rest of my life. I deserve to breathe.

I deserve to be healthy. I can overcome my addiction to cigarette smoking.

- ◆ I am afraid that if I don't quit smoking, I will get laryngeal cancer and never be able to speak or sing again.

I deserve to speak. I deserve to sing. I can overcome my addiction to cigarette smoking.

- ◆ I'm afraid that I will die soon because I already have emphysema. It's too late for me.

Everyone dies. I deserve to breathe easier before I die. There is still time for me to live. There is still much for me to enjoy. I can overcome my addiction to cigarette smoking.

Carry the new list with you and read it every time you get the urge to smoke before you actually light up. If possible, read the "I deserve" parts out loud. Take a deep breath when you finish reading.

If you were unable to identify any fear(s), try doing some research online or at your public library about cancer, emphysema and the other health hazards associated with smoking. There are lots of good reasons to feel afraid. Pick one that you can relate to the most.

List Four: What I Will Gain If I Conquer My Addiction

Write down all the ways in which you will benefit from quitting. Try to think of as many benefits as you can. Here is a small list to get you started:

- ◆ my health will improve
- ◆ I'll have more energy
- ◆ my hair will smell clean
- ◆ my clothes will smell clean
- ◆ my breath will be fresher
- ◆ I won't have to empty and clean smelly ashtrays anymore
- ◆ I'll have more time to do other things
- ◆ I will enjoy food much more
- ◆ I'll have more money (an extra _____ to spend each week which adds up to an extra _____ each year)
- ◆ I'll be able to make more friends
- ◆ the air I breathe will be better
- ◆ I won't have to worry about my List Three fear(s) anymore.

Keep this list by your bedside and read it after your last cigarette before you go to sleep at night and as soon as you wake up in the morning (before your first cigarette). Take a deep breath before and after reading it.

CHAPTER THREE

Learning Not to Inhale

I decided to describe this now instead of later, just to get you used to the idea. It could be said that it's the hardest part of the whole program, because it's the way you kick 95 percent of your physical addiction and what you go through emotionally and physically is pretty intense. You may not feel ready just yet to learn to smoke without inhaling, and that's okay for now, but it has to be done eventually so start psyching yourself up for it.

Learning not to inhale goes hand in hand with giving yourself permission to smoke as much as you want to as long as you don't inhale the smoke. This means that you can smoke ten packs of cigarettes a day if you want to, as long as you don't inhale. Learning not to inhale is difficult, but giving yourself permission to smoke as much as you want to as long as you don't inhale will make the transition easier.

Smoking without inhaling is really not that much better for you - it still pollutes the air around you and your risk of developing mouth and other cancers is higher than if you gave up all together. However, smoking without inhaling the smoke will reduce the risks of throat and lung cancer; people who smoke cigars and pipes run a lower risk of these cancers because they don't inhale the smoke. In addition, when you learn to give up inhaling the smoke, you will have given up one of the most pleasurable things about cigarette smoking and will be well on your way to quitting altogether. I noticed after I had learned not to inhale that I was smoking fewer cigarettes every day without even trying, probably partly because it wasn't as pleasurable and partly because I had overcome most of the physical part of my addiction.

It may seem crazy to recommend that you give yourself permission to smoke an unlimited number of cigarettes as long as you don't inhale the smoke. Please keep in mind that I'm assuming the reason you're reading this paper is because you want to overcome your addiction and not because you're looking for an excuse to smoke hundreds of cigarettes a day. I'm advocating permission to smoke without inhaling as a stepping stone on the way to smoking very little, if at all.

During the two or three days that it takes you to learn not to inhale, you can expect to feel restless, irritable, grouchy, agitated, nervous, depressed, unable to sit still, touchy, oversensitive, jittery, anxious, agitated, worried, tense, and hard to get along with. In a word, miserable. This is because when you stop inhaling you go through a strong physical withdrawal from the nicotine. So, before you make this big change in your life, sit down and think about how you can make yourself feel more comfortable during the transition.

One thing that might help you is to allow yourself to eat as much of anything you want during these two or three miserable days. Make a list of things you like to eat and drink (non-alcoholic) and make sure that you have plenty of everything on hand. Once you've learned how to smoke without inhaling, you can return to normal eating behaviour.

You don't need to abstain from alcohol during this time, but don't drink it excessively; you want to smoke without inhaling as a conscious, determined activity, and you want to stay in control during these two or three stressful days. Drinking water might help satisfy some of the intense craving you will feel, so try drinking water first before you light up a cigarette.

Plan to do some things to keep your mind off your irritability like going to a movie, going swimming, going to a concert, knitting a sweater, cooking yourself a nice meal, gardening, sleeping - activities where cigarettes are not allowed or would get in the way.

Try to avoid activities that make you nervous and tense and try to pick a time to learn not to inhale when you won't be under a lot of pressure in some other way. Learn to do it when you are able to meet the stress of it with all of your strength and ingenuity.

No matter what, one of the few comforts you will have during this time is that you can still light up a cigarette whenever you want to and puff away, as long as you don't inhale the smoke. This two or three day period is probably the only time during the course of the program that you may feel like smoking ten packs of cigarettes a day.

And don't say you could never learn to enjoy smoking without inhaling the smoke until you've given it a good honest try. Anyone can learn not to inhale. It probably takes more than two or three days to find it almost as satisfying, but after two or three days you will have overcome 95 percent of your physical addiction to nicotine and you won't want to undo what you've accomplished by starting to inhale the smoke again.

When you're ready, it's really simple: Whenever you light up just say to yourself "I give myself permission to smoke as often as I want to as long as I don't inhale", and don't inhale. Just don't inhale the smoke from then on. Be prepared and don't give in. Ever. It gets easier and easier as time goes by.

CHAPTER FOUR

Disrupting Your Smoking Habits

Start a new list entitled "**My Smoking Habits**". Look back over your week and try to identify the situations in which you always smoked. If you have trouble remembering, carry this list around with you for several days so that you can add to it easily. Don't worry about organizing it until later; that is, it doesn't matter if you write down a situation from your morning after a situation from your afternoon.

When you feel that your list is complete, copy it to a new sheet of paper, organizing it according to the time of day. The first few lines of your ordered list might look something like this:

06:30 after the alarm goes off, thinking about the day ahead

06:55 after shower while getting dressed for work

07:05 while reading the morning paper

07:45 in the car on the way to work

08:15 with cup of coffee at work

08:20 on telephone

An important part of the program is to identify and disrupt any smoking habits that you have. If you always smoke when you drive the car, lock your cigarettes in the glove compartment so that you can't get to them until you arrive at your destination. If you always smoke when talking on the telephone, try to wait until you hang up before lighting up. If you always smoke as soon as you wake up in the morning, try postponing that first cigarette until after your shower or after your breakfast. If you smoke alone and with others, you could try smoking only when you are alone. If you always smoke when you drink coffee/tea/alcohol, try now and then not to. If you always smoke after meals, try to delay smoking for as long as possible afterwards.

Work on one thing at a time and when it becomes easy, add another. If you don't feel strong enough to always do something (like always locking your cigarettes in the glove compartment), try to do it at least occasionally. It will help you a lot to try to become inconsistent about your smoking from one day to the next - to break the habit patterns - so that every day is different and you don't always smoke under similar sets of circumstances. When you're good at doing something occasionally, try to do it more and more often so that eventually you're doing it all the time.

Remember, you still have permission to smoke whenever you want as long as you don't inhale. You are just playing a little game with your daily habits. Do it gently and try to make it challenging and fun.

CHAPTER FIVE

Smoking Less Each Day

When you are totally comfortable with not inhaling and are ready for a new challenge, you can begin to work on smoking less each day, remembering that you always have permission to smoke as much as you want to as long as you don't inhale. Cutting down on the number of cigarettes you smoke is not something you do rigidly and unforgivingly to yourself. It's something you have to make an effort to do, but you should approach it as another game that you play with your smoking behaviour. Try to make it challenging and fun and reward yourself when you have an especially good day.

Do your best each day. Maybe you smoke ten cigarettes one day and a pack and a half the next, then the next day only four and the day after that seven. Everything is okay, as long as you don't inhale.

When you start to do this, you might want to review your list of your smoking habits. Have you been able to change your habits significantly? Have you added any new habits that you could eliminate now? At what times during the day could you possibly postpone having a cigarette or eliminate one altogether?

Alternative Diversions

One way to help yourself smoke less each day is to take up one or more activities that don't allow you to smoke while you are doing them. Some things which come to mind are:

- ◆ take singing lessons or join a choir
- ◆ take classes in modern dancing or aerobics, or study a martial art
- ◆ go to the movies
- ◆ go jogging regularly
- ◆ join a theater group and help put on a play
- ◆ learn to draw or paint or teach classes if you already know how
- ◆ take up photography, including developing and printing your photos
- ◆ take a class in something which interests you
- ◆ learn to knit or crochet and make some nice things for yourself and your family and friends
- ◆ go swimming regularly
- ◆ learn to fly an airplane or to skydive
- ◆ take cooking classes
- ◆ cultivate friendships with non-smokers and spend time with them
- ◆ do some volunteer work for your local hospital

Breathing

Whenever you get the urge to smoke, try to delay lighting up by taking a few deep breaths. Tell yourself how good the clean, smokeless air is for you. Breathing deeply instead of smoking will give you more energy. Appreciate how much more energy you have by breathing the good clean air. Make yourself a list of things you can do with your increased energy and do them instead of lighting up.

Food

I didn't mention food under alternative diversions, because I didn't want to imply that you should replace your smoking time with eating time or with an addiction to food. But you have to eat to live, whereas you don't have to smoke to live, and you can get a lot of enjoyment out of preparing nourishing and tasty food for yourself and your friends and/or family. If cooking is not something you already enjoy, you might try your hand at it as a constructive way to divert your attention away from smoking.

I also feel that it's better to indulge your oral fixation by eating healthy food rather than by smoking. Since you will probably be tempted to snack as an alternative to smoking, especially when you are learning not to inhale, here is a small list of nourishing foods that can be used for snacks and that don't require a lot of preparation:

- unsalted nuts

- salami slices

- smoked salmon slices

- olives

- cheese

- melba toast

- fresh fruit (peaches, strawberries, apricots, oranges, pears, apples, grapes, bananas)

- fresh vegetables (celery sticks, cauliflower florets, sliced tomatoes)

Water

Always keep a tall glass of water handy and reach for it whenever you get the urge to light up. Really taste the water and enjoy it. Try to defer smoking for as long as possible by drinking water instead.

CHAPTER SIX

Increasing the Pressure

After several weeks of making a conscious effort to cut down on the number of cigarettes you smoke each day, you should find that you are smoking less and less without having to try very hard. Eventually you may find that you are alternating between smaller numbers of cigarettes each day - four cigarettes one day, two the next, eight the next, three the next, one the next, and so on. When you feel strong enough you can try to see how long you can go without smoking at all, always remembering that you can smoke whenever you want to as long as you don't inhale.

My experience was that one evening I bragged to a friend that I hadn't had even one cigarette that day and she said to me, "Well, you've quit - just don't smoke any more". So I tried really hard and went for about three days without smoking. Then I went on a journey that was really stressful. The car broke down and it took about nine hours to get to where I was going instead of only three. When I arrived at my destination I held out for about two more hours and then I finally broke down and had a cigarette without inhaling. And you know what? It didn't do anything for me. It was such a funny surprise! I never smoked on a regular basis after that and I consider myself cured of my addiction.