

# **QUIT SMOKING**

***A DIY GUIDE BY  
EX-SMOKERS***

# Why a DIY quitting smoking zine?

This zine exists because I wanted to share what I'd learned from my experiences of quitting smoking in order to help other people quit. I "quit" seven times, and since only the last attempt was successful, I feel like I have a pretty good handle on the various methods. I enlisted a few other people, all ex-smokers, to offer their own advice and information, and what you have here is the product of that collaborative effort. It consists mostly of practical information for someone who has already decided that they want to quit, but there is also some other information, such as the "history" section, that is meant to provide motivation.

An auxiliary goal was to put smoking into the broader context of an anarchist analysis, just as some have done for veganism, and provide the practical means for achieving the desired end: quitting. As the new urban, health-conscious image of the non-smoking jogger who only shops at Whole Foods takes over cities and suburbs, it seems like quitting smoking is just a fad, and moreover one that is supported and enforced by government policy. My point is to put forwards reasons and means for quitting smoking that are explicitly anti-capitalist and DIY.

## Smoking, Capitalism, and Anarchy

The strength of capitalism, the real core of its infinite and perverse ingenuity, is its ability to turn potential problems into sources of profit. One example of this greedy aikido is the industry that has sprung up around quitting smoking. Tobacco is probably the only commodity on the market that leads directly to the death of its consumers, which you'd think would lead to problems with demand, especially when you consider that the best customers, the ones that consume the most tobacco, are the quickest to die.

The tobacco industry's solution is to constantly recruit new smokers to replace dead ones, but another group of capitalists have found a way to cash in on the desire of living smokers to kick their addictions. They flood supermarket aisles with nicotine patches, gum, dissolvable strips, they invent new drugs that claim to shut off the addiction in your brain, they sell you motivational books, calendars, cards and a plethora of other shit, all of which is outrageously expensive and completely unnecessary. And so, a potential problem—a product that kills customers—is turned into profit, as the consumers'

fear now drives the market in quitting smoking gimmicks. The basic purpose of this zine is to help you quit smoking without making a bunch of marketing jerks rich in the process.

Today, cigarettes primarily serve as a means of self-medication for people who are exploited and unfulfilled. The cubicle rat that spends most of his waking life staring at a computer screen yearns to be in Marlborough Country during his 15 minute break. The secretary who spends her day alternately screamed at and hit-on by her boss would give anything to be laughing and palling around like the women in the Virginia Slim ad. Smoknig is a way to let off the steam accumulated during a stressful day, "kill" time when we're not working for our bosses, renew focus for tasks we'd rather not be doing, and help us escape from the reality we involuntarily inhabit. But the real escape that comes from smoking is none of these things. It is the small suicide we perform every time we light up, a morbid fantasy we'll only allow ourselves in small doses. It is death on the installment plan, with the installments paid to some of the world's richest corporations.

I remember standing outside the office where I used to work, smoking with my co-workers, shooting the shit, and I'd wonder what would happen if we didn't have this little life-ending safety valve. Maybe we'd be unable to put up with the conditions in that fluorescent nightmare on the 6th floor, I'd think. Maybe we'd get so fed up with it, we'd express our frustration in other ways, ways that made it harder for us to be exploited instead of easier to kill. And then I would wonder what would happen if we didn't have any of those little safety valves, like cigarettes or video games or televised sports, all of which are so profitable for other people's bosses.

Maybe—just maybe—if we didn't have those things, more of us would step outside during our 15-minute breaks, look around at the world we've done so much to create, and instead of doing something to numb ourselves to it, we'd be so fed up with it all, so tired of being shit on and squeezed dry, so pissed about all the time we'd wasted working for someone else instead of pursuing our dreams, so repulsed by the way we treat each other and the things we allow others to do to us, that we would decide to never come back, to never let ourselves be subjected to it again. And maybe—sometimes I'd really start dreaming—maybe we'd come back and use our lighters for a different purpose, one that meant no one would ever need to go back inside an office ever again.

# A Few Highlights From The History Of Tobacco

Modern capitalism was, of course, built in part to facilitate the international trade in tobacco and other commodities produced on European-owned slave plantations in the New World. Jamestown, the first British colony in North America, produced almost nothing but tobacco (going so far as to use it as currency at one point), and the various colonies that sprung up soon after in the Carolinas followed a similar tobacco-intensive model, enriching their investors at the expense of slaves, indentured servants, indigenous people, and the land. The large sums of money that could be made in tobacco production led the British colonists to declare open-ended war on the indigenous people that occupied the lands around them, beginning a process of theft and murder that would go on to become one of the most horrific genocides in human history.

Tobacco was, of course, used by indigenous people long before the arrival of the British, but not at all in the same way. North American indigenous groups used tobacco very rarely and only for ceremonial or religious purposes. They did not consume it regularly, as modern smokers do, nor did they use it recreationally. Typically it was used in extremely high doses by experienced medicine men or shamans for its hallucinogenic effects. So don't think that smoking those American Spirits, which so crassly exploit offensive stereotypes of indigenous people, makes you any different from any other person who forks over their hard-earned cash to giant corporations in order to satisfy their addiction. (American Spirits are made by Reynolds American, a \$19.5 billion corporation, who also produce Camels and Winstons.)

Anyway, the blood-soaked tobacco sent home by the British invaders quickly became a huge hit with people all over around the British Empire. Tobacco growing expanded exponentially, and it was packaged in all kinds of new forms, like snuff, chew, cigars, and pipes. And while it was consumed by all classes of people for the first 300 plus years of its popularity in Europe, it was almost exclusively the province of men, which limited its profitability in a big way. It was generally considered unfeminine and inappropriate for women to smoke, and virtually no women participated in the act publicly.

Recognizing this as a business problem, George Washington Hill, president of the American Tobacco Company, hired a man named Edward Bernays in 1929 to broaden smoking's appeal among women. Bernays promptly organized the most ingenious publicity stunt of all time, using the most prominent social movement of his time—the

struggle for women's suffrage—as a marketing tool for cigarettes.

Bernays arranged for New York City debutantes to march in that year's Easter Day Parade, defiantly smoking cigarettes as a statement of rebellion against the norms of a male-dominated society. Publicity photos of these fashion models smoking "Torches of Liberty" were sent to various media outlets and appeared worldwide. The taboo was quickly dissolved and smoking was suddenly associated with women's liberation. Some women even demanded membership in all-male smoking clubs, a highly controversial act at the time. (This nicely illustrates why it's so important to have a critique of privilege—don't join the club, burn it down!) For his work, Bemays was paid a tidy sum, and his employer was no doubt pleased that half of the world's population had suddenly become potential tobacco consumers.

Having found their jackpot, tobacco corporations haven't really changed tactics much in the last 80 years. Cigarettes are still marketed as signifiers of edginess and freedom, and tobacco advertisers have been particularly adept at attaching their product to whatever is hip and avant-garde at the time. Unfortunately, the anarchist community has been fertile ground for these idiotic marketing ploys! When I look around at anarchist gatherings and see how many people smoke, it amazes me that so many people who are supposed to be working to bring down capitalism so willingly allow themselves to be duped by a bunch of capitalists with a poisonous product and a clever pitch.

## Starting to Quit

So you've decided to quit. That's fantastic news. It can be hard to get to this point, so we're really excited to have you. Welcome to the club.

Quitting is not easy. Like I said, I quit seven times, and most people require multiple attempts before they're ultimately successful. Part of the reason I failed so many times is that I was always trying to figure it out as I went along. It is my hope that with the information contained in this zine, you will be better prepared than I was, and hopefully you will be able to quit successfully on the first try. If it doesn't work out, don't get discouraged. Figure out what went wrong and try again. It's worth the effort, I promise.

The only approach that has worked for anyone I know is quitting cold turkey. Attempts to cut down inevitably backfire and often lead to a renewed commitment to the addiction. Cold turkey is the way to go. You just have to stop. Repeat: just stop.

Depending on how much you smoke, you're going to experience varying degrees of withdrawal when you stop smoking. I smoked between half a pack to a pack a day, and my withdrawal lasted about two weeks. For those two weeks, I experienced a slew of symptoms, none of which were pleasant. I was more irritable and my temper shortened considerably, especially with small annoyances. I had trouble focusing and not much of my work got done. I was often tired but also unable to sleep. I had headaches, occasional cold sweats, and some weirdness with my lungs. Probably the biggest change though was in my diet. Smoking tobacco reduces the flow of blood to your stomach muscles, which is part of why it suppresses hunger, so my stomach was very confused when I quit, and it wasn't sure when it wanted food.

All of those symptoms are typical; you may or may not experience them and a few others as well. And yes, all of that is quite unpleasant, which is why it's really important to time your quitting attempt thoughtfully.

## **To Plan or Not to Plan?**

There are, actually, two schools of thought on whether or not you should plan your quit. Although I am of the "plan ahead" school, one contributor to this zine argues for taking advantage of unexpected, propitious conditions.

I argue that it is critical that you be prepared to deal with the symptoms of withdrawal in a healthy way, so you should schedule your quit like you would a two week long diet. Plan on drinking extra water, maybe have some Tylenol or something similar on hand (they proved helpful to me), make sure that you have a place to escape to when you want to get away from other people, ensure that you'll be able to eat regularly and healthfully, and give yourself enough to do so that you'll be busy but not so busy that you'll be overly stressed. I say this planning will be crucial to your success, so take it seriously. Just the act of preparation itself will strengthen you mentally for the task ahead, which is key.

The second school of thought goes something like this... So when should you quit if you're not going to plan it? Well, one choice is right now, if you find these arguments convincing. Each time I quit it was either because I had gotten thoroughly sick of the idea of smoking or because I was legitimately sick. When you have a cold or a sore throat, or any other ailment, smoking will make your body feel like shit and prolong whatever illness you have, and many people do in fact quit

inadvertently for the duration of their illnesses. So the next time you come down with the common cold or the flu, make a simultaneous pledge to never smoke another cigarette.

A few days later when you start getting better and have a real craving for a cigarette, you'll be able to use that time as an example for yourself. Think, "I made it three days, why not try 10 more." Tell yourself and your body that you want to wait out the two weeks, "just to see if we can do it." Once you do it, you probably won't go back. In the end there are different tactics that work for different people, but these ones are worth trying out. If you're going to try this route, my advice is to catch a cold as soon as possible. The sick waiting room at a pediatrician's office is generally a good place to start, and it's open year-round.

According to this same "don't plan" school, another opportunity is often presented, ironically, by drinking. Cigarettes and alcohol have a long relationship and the alcohol-related hangover can be worse if a lot of cigarettes have been smoked, drying out the body and reducing its ability to restore the energy lost through alcohol consumption. So another good time to quit is the night after a drunken bender. You wake up with a splitting headache and the taste of burnt nicotine in your mouth. Flush the rest of your smokes down the toilet. A hangover only lasts a day, but remind yourself of how shitty you felt that morning. Recalling the nausea and gross feeling may help keep you on the bandwagon until you've broken the habit.

## **Which Ever You Choose**

Your ability to keep yourself motivated and determined for the length of your withdrawal is critical to your success. Do whatever you need to do. You can make yourself a calendar and cross off days as you go, and proudly tell your friends "I've been quit for 3 days" (or however long you've actually been quit). You can post pictures on your calendar of black lungs, people with holes in their throats, loved ones who died of smoking-related illnesses (most people have at least one).

Or, if you're motivated more by justice or spite than self-preservation, perhaps pictures of high ranking tobacco executives staring you in the face every morning is what you need, or pictures of dogs, primates and cats hooked up to smoking machines to test the products from which you are trying to distance yourself. Maybe something to remind you that farmers in the Global South are forced to grow your tobacco instead of food for their families. Whatever that

thing is that scares you, guilt's you, or just enrages you, play it up!

So here's the good news: when the withdrawal is over, you feel absolutely incredible, and not just in some kind of abstract "Yay, I succeeded" kind of way. As the chemicals in the brain come back into balance, many people experience extended periods of euphoria when they quit smoking. For me, right at two weeks after my last smoke, I literally felt like I was walking on six inches of marshmallows for three straight days. It was the best my body had felt without taking drugs, and my physical cravings completely vanished at the same time. The sensation was unbelievable and made the whole thing totally worth it, even without taking all the other benefits into account. So maybe it'll help you stick out the rough times to know that your brain is going to release tons of fun chemicals when you get over the hump.

## Things To Do Instead Of Smoking A Cigarette:

- Shoplift (The small adrenaline rush can help kill a craving)
- Run around the block or do some small exercise (same deal)
- Eat a lozenge (put the fun in your mouth)
- Introduce yourself to a stranger (gives you something to do if you're standing outside, can also lead to adrenaline rush)
- Write a letter (what better time to write a letter than when you have nothing else to do?)
- Make a smoothie (delicious, ingredients easily dumpstered, healthy)
- Go for a short walk (space out, stare at trees or buildings, kill ten minutes pleasantly)
- Flip through a Thesaurus (it's surprisingly entertaining and there is probably one in your local library's dumpster)
- Make a list of things you're going to do tomorrow (if quitting leads to increased personal productivity you're going to feel even better about it)
- Masturbate (feels good, can last as long or as short as you want, leaves you feeling calmer)
- Eat sunflower seeds (one ex-smoker friend who swears by this, and seriously, the dude is always eating sunflower)

# The Mental Part

Unfortunately, physical addiction is only part of what makes it hard to quit, and some people even claim that it's the smaller part. The psychological attachment to something that is a regular part of your day can be very strong. Smoking is a part of the smoker's day in a way that few other things are. Smokers don't forget to smoke or say "I'll just do it tomorrow."

This actually became a prime source of motivation for me. I realized that the only things I did as regularly as smoking were eating and going to the bathroom, both of which are absolutely fundamental to my continued existence, unlike smoking, which was going to discontinue my existence. It just didn't seem right to me that this ridiculous, expensive, self-destructive habit had somehow become as important to me as taking a shit or getting a hot meal. I decided that that level of priority in my life was reserved for things that are good for me and contribute to my larger goals in life, like writing and stealing and creating anarchy, all of which have become much more regular parts of my day since I quit (which is crazy because I used to think that I needed cigarettes to get me through those activities). Now, I'm much more effective at all of those things, and I get to keep a lot more of my money too.

The toughest psychological part of quitting is figuring out what to do in the place of smoking. Identifying and dealing with your triggers is key. This is a delicate process since smoking is often linked to other vices and giving them up all at once could just set you up for a relapse. Maybe there are other things you need to deal with first. One contributor to this zine had to stop taking acid and speed before he could quit smoking cigarettes because quitting all of those things at once was just too much to handle. If you have other addictions that correlate to smoking, you might have to work on those first. If your triggers are less pernicious, like, say, eating or socializing with strangers, you should identify those situations and find a way to handle them without smoking.

A time honored tradition of addicts everywhere is "swapping," meaning that you find a new habit to replace the old one. This is tricky because you have to make sure that your new habit is better for you than your old one. Some people do small things that satisfy their desire to have something in their hand and in their mouth at specific times, like having some chocolate or a pinch of fennel seed after eating,

or sucking on lozenges when they go for walks, or carrying around a water bottle to sip on when they're sitting around or chatting.

I adopted some of these strategies in the short term and they helped, but I've since given them all up. Ultimately, I had to do something bigger. For me (and many other ex-smokers) that thing was exercise. Something happens with the brain chemicals when you exercise (the "runners high," I guess) that makes you feel calm and focused and slightly euphoric in much the same way you do from smoking. And that, for me, was what ultimately made the whole thing sustainable because I got that little rush every day without having to smoke. Also every time I wanted a cigarette, I'd think about how much harder it would be to do my exercises if I had a smoke. So it worked out nicely: on the one hand, it made me want cigarettes much less and made my body feel much better in general and on the other hand, I feared the effects a cigarette would have on my already difficult workouts. But maybe exercising isn't your bag. The key is just to find something that makes you feel good and doesn't hurt your body. Whatever that is, try to make it supercede smoking.

## Staying Quit

If you've adopted a new habit, like exercise, really focus on working it into your routine for the first three months. Be hyper-aware when you're in the presence of smokers, keep a close watch on your triggers, and don't allow yourself to be put in situations in which you know you'll want to smoke. Count up all the money you're saving, rejoice in your ability to walk up a flight of stairs without hyperventilating, and reward yourself for staying quit with whatever feels like a relatively healthy, enjoyable indulgence. (I like making vegan root beer floats, and I just had a glass of chilled rooibos tea blended with soy milk plus some tapioca balls at the bottom and it was fucking delicious, so I'd totally recommend that in place of a cigarette too.)

Staying focused and vigilant is critical for the first three months, but after a certain point, most ex-smokers are just completely repulsed by the thought of smoking. Once you realize you've gotten to that point, you can't help but be proud of yourself. Here's this horrible habit that had you completely at its mercy, and now you reject it effortlessly. It's a nice moment. And once you've gotten to that point, you can let your guard down a little. Smoking hasn't occurred to me as a realistic possibility in a long time, even when tragic, upsetting

things have happened in my life. Before I reached that point though, upsetting things would send me into a tailspin, and I had to work hard to get smoking out of my mind. But just so you know, that doesn't last forever. At a certain point, you don't have to worry about it too much.

Ultimately, quitting is much harder than staying quit, and that's something you can use as motivation during the difficult initial stage. It's hard early on, but you only have to fight for so long before you win. So don't give up easily. It's worth it in the end.

## Random General Advice

- If you live in a northern area, winter is the time to do it, especially now that there's an indoor smoking ban in most places. Laugh as your friends go outside to smoke in windy, 0 degree weather, the icy wind cutting mercilessly through their layered clothing. Behold the joy of keeping your hands in your pockets on long walks as your friend's finger tips turn first red, then blue. And relax because you can finally leave the windows up in the car, on the highway, during a snowstorm.

- If you have a job, go to school, or have other stress activity that you normally break up with smoking: Don't deny yourself breaks. Go outside, breathe fresh air, space out a little bit, just don't smoke.

- At shows start a lit distro or some other table so that between bands, instead of milling about, this actually becomes your busiest time, socializing over literature and ideas instead of your common addictions.

- Try to avoid socializing with people that are smoking for a while after you quit, especially if you drink. A few beers will make you much more likely to think "I'll have just one" and trust me it's all over after that.

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