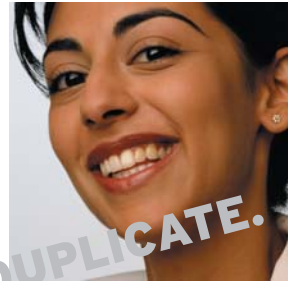




A Guide
To Remaining
Smoke Free



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What If
You Have A
Cigarette?

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This is the fourth booklet in the Forever Free series. This booklet covers the effects of a “slip”—having a cigarette after you have quit. Although this is a short booklet, the topic is very important. Ex-smokers who start smoking again always start with a single cigarette. That first cigarette is an important one.

Can't I Have Just One Cigarette?

The answer to this question is “No!!” Sometimes ex-smokers try to tell themselves that they will be able to smoke only one cigarette without a problem. There are times when it can be very tempting to think of smoking “just one.” For example: when you are under a lot of stress, when you are having a strong urge, when you are with smokers, or when you are in any high-risk situation.

“Nine out of ten ex-smokers who have a cigarette after quitting later return to regular smoking.”

The vast majority of ex-smokers cannot have “just one.” Research shows that if you have even **one** cigarette after quitting, there is a 90% chance that you will return to regular smoking!! That's right—for every 10 ex-smokers who have a cigarette after quitting, 9 end up returning to regular smoking. It does not happen right away, but one cigarette can lead to another, and another. You may have heard that a recovering alcoholic should never drink alcohol. It is even more important for ex-smokers to avoid smoking than it is for alcoholics to avoid drinking alcohol! This is because nicotine is much more addicting than alcohol. Therefore, you must do everything you can to avoid having that first cigarette. When you are tempted to smoke, remember to use the behavioral and mental coping skills that are listed in Booklet 2, “Smoking Urges.”

“You must do everything you can to avoid that first cigarette.”

Be Prepared for a Slip

Remember, if you do smoke the odds are against you. We added this part in order to give you a fighting chance against those odds. Some people are afraid to plan for a slip because they fear that they can then have a cigarette. Also, some smoking cessation programs never teach their clients what to do if they slip. They fear that talking about it will make it more likely to happen. We believe that it would be a mistake for us not to talk about slips.

Most people who try to quit smoking end up having a cigarette. As stated above, most of these people then return to regular smoking. We are not ready to write people off as failures if they have a cigarette after quitting. We think that it makes more sense to be **prepared**, just in case you have a cigarette.

Being prepared for a slip is **not** the same as telling yourself it is okay to smoke. It is important to think about what you should do in case you slip. You need to have your coping skills ready to help you put down that cigarette. You also need your coping skills to prevent you from lighting another one.

In the first booklet, we compared preparing for a slip to preparing for a fire. If you have children, you may have taken the time to talk to them about what to do in case of fire. They should know ways to get out. They should roll on the ground if their clothes catch on fire. And so on. They should also know that a fire is very serious. Just because they know how to respond to a fire does not mean that it's okay for them to play with matches. They still need to prevent fires at all costs. The same is true for smoking. Having a cigarette after you have quit is like "playing with fire." **AVOID SMOKING AT ALL COSTS,** but know what to do just in case you do have a cigarette.

Watch Out For the Effects of a Slip

Arlene quit smoking nearly three years ago. She was feeling very good about being a non-smoker. She had been able to deal with the urges she felt soon after quitting. One evening when Arlene was dining out, she took her friend's offer of an after-dinner cigarette. She thought to herself, "What could it hurt. I know I have kicked my habit!" The next day Arlene felt very guilty. She figured that she had blown all her work to quit smoking. "What's the use? I'm a failure," she told herself. She felt that she may as well pick up a pack of cigarettes on her way home from work as a way to cheer herself up.

Arlene's story shows two things that tend to happen when people have a cigarette after quitting. First, they think that all is lost and that there is no point in trying any longer. This is like a dieter who has that first piece of pie and thinks, "I have blown my diet, so I may as well finish the whole pie." Thinking like that only gets you into deeper trouble. A whole pie is much worse than one slice, and a pack of cigarettes is much worse than one cigarette.

The second thing that happens after a cigarette is that smokers tend to feel guilty and bad. They tend to "beat themselves up." This makes them feel worse. And remember that one of the big risk factors for relapse is negative mood. Then, they get an even greater urge to smoke, which often leads to smoking again.

The common reaction to having a cigarette is to say "I blew it," and then give up and blame oneself. Because Arlene felt that all was lost, and that she was a failure, she then went on to smoke more. Within a few weeks she was back to smoking a pack per day. This is a very common response to having a slip. If you cannot avoid the slip, the next best thing is to know when it happens. Then, instead of going back to smoking, you can take action to get back on track.

The "I Blew It" Reaction

- Feeling that all is lost.
- Feeling guilty.
- Letting these feelings lead to more smoking.

Keep a Slip from Turning into a Full Relapse

Michael stopped smoking about six weeks ago. His physical withdrawal symptoms were gone, but he still felt a strong craving for cigarettes when he was out with friends. Michael decided to buy a pack one night when he was at a bar with some friends who smoked. The next day, he felt bad about his slip. Michael decided that he was not going to let it get him too down. He threw away the cigarettes he bought the night before. He thought to himself, "The cigarettes I smoked last night are the last ones I am going to smoke. I have made it this far, I'm not going to give up now!" He felt relieved right away that he had renewed his commitment to staying quit. Next time he went to a bar with friends, he was aware that he might be tempted to smoke. He prepared for it by bringing mints to chew on. He also told himself that if his smoking urges were too strong, he would leave.

Michael's story shows how a smoker can stop a slip from turning into a full relapse. Michael found that he was able to throw the cigarettes away to decrease his slip. He also used a mental coping strategy by telling himself that he was not going to smoke anymore. And instead of seeing himself as a failure, Michael learned to prepare for the next time.

You too will be a lot better off if you see your slip as a way to learn about yourself. Beating yourself up for slipping does not help.

Sometimes the danger of the first slip sneaks up on you.

Victor broke down and had a cigarette a couple of months after quitting. To his surprise, the cigarette didn't taste very good to him at all. He put it out and felt sure that he would not ever have another. But, two weeks later he was tempted again. He told himself, "I was able to control it last time without getting hooked. I'll be able to control it again." So he had one. This happened four or five times over the next month before Victor realized that he liked the cigarettes and the urges were coming more often.

This shows that a slip can be harmful even if you think you have handled it at the time. Each cigarette makes it easier to have just one more.

It is important to commit to quitting again right away.

Linda had her first slip on Thanksgiving, about a month after she had quit smoking. She had just totaled her car, and she bummed a cigarette from the tow-truck driver. She later felt guilty and believed she had failed. She also knew that she still wanted to be a non-smoker. She decided that she would try to quit again after Christmas—2 months away. She slowly increased her smoking until she was back at her old rate of a pack per day. On New Year's Day she quit smoking once again. But, because she waited so long she had withdrawal symptoms again.

Linda did what many people do after slipping. She put off quitting again. And, as each holiday went by, Linda became less and less like an ex-smoker. The longer she waited before stopping, the harder it became to quit again. That is because the smoking habit—and the nicotine addiction—gets stronger and stronger. It is far easier to quit again after smoking one cigarette than it is after smoking a pack. And it is easier to quit after smoking for one day than it is after smoking for one week or one month.

You should also try to learn from your slip. What do you think led up to your urge for the first cigarette? In other words, what was the high risk situation? How might you cope better with such an urge in the future? What coping skills should you use next time you have a strong urge to smoke? Look back in Booklet 2 for ideas.

The Main Message:

If you smoke, quit again as soon as you can.



Summary

The odds are stacked against you if you have a cigarette after quitting. So do what you can to avoid smoking. However, if you do have a cigarette...

1. Put it out and get rid of any cigarettes.
2. Think of that cigarette as a “slip,” and not a “relapse.” It does not have to mean that all is lost.
3. Even though you may be upset with yourself, do not “beat yourself up.”
4. Use behavioral and mental coping strategies right away. Renew your commitment to quitting, leave the situation, call a friend...
5. Make that cigarette your last. Do not put off quitting again until tomorrow, next week, or next year. The sooner you commit yourself to quitting again, the easier it will be, because your body will not yet have readjusted itself to nicotine.
6. Learn from your slip. What led up to your smoking? You now know this is a high risk situation that will need better preparation the next time.

Tips are shown in the box below. Cut it out and keep it in your wallet. Then, if you happen to slip, you can read it right away and take action.

In Case You Smoke...

1. Get rid of any cigarettes.
2. Think of that first cigarette as a “slip” rather than a “relapse.”
3. Do not feel bad and give up.
4. Use behavioral and mental coping skills. (Leave the situation, call a friend, and/or list your reasons for quitting.)
5. Commit to quitting again right away.
6. Learn from your slip. Be better prepared next time.



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Director: Thomas H. Brandon, Ph.D.
1(877) 954-2548

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