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## Smoking Is An Illness Not a Bad Habit

Posted by: [Max Crean](#)

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You know exactly when and where you started smoking, who you were with, and why you did it. The characters and motivation that got you into it are gone but the habit is still with you years and years later. You are probably one of the many smokers who paradoxically hate smoking. Your daily life is punctuated by brief periods of habitual smoke inhalation, each lungful carrying with it a twinge of conscience. Perhaps you maintain a fiction that each pack of cigarettes you buy will be your last. Does all this all sound very familiar? No matter how many you smoke a day you need to understand you can get off them, you really can.

What you have is an illness and don't think for a moment it is anything else. Calling it a bad habit puts it in the same category as picking your nose or biting your fingernails, they are not even in the same league. It annoys me now that there was no-one around for years to put that view across to me. So here are a few things I would like to say on the cravings for food smokers experience when they begin to breathe free of smoke and how to cope with them.

Smoking suppresses your appetite, knowing how it does this, and why you do the things you do to harm your own body helps you to prepare for quitting, and more importantly sticking with the quit. Among other things nicotine is a poison and it will kill you if taken in large quantities, nicotine also affects your blood sugar levels directly, the body monitors these levels constantly and sends signals to the brain when it needs to get its energy levels up, you feel these as as hunger pangs. Non-smokers will traditionally satisfy appetite at breakfast, lunch and evening meal. For the smoker things can be considerably different and here's why.

It takes about 20 minutes to chew and digest food to the point the body recognises a blood sugar hit [1] and stops sending feedme signals. A dose of nicotine on the other hand causes the body to release its own reserves of sugar giving the smoker an almost immediate blood sugar fix. The body becomes accustomed to this over the years, developing a partial dependancy on the nicotine to regulate its blood sugar levels. When the smoker quits it will take a while for the body to retake full control, as I understand it about three days. In the meantime the ex-smoker, you, has to make a pact with yourself to just eat normally then wait for at least twenty minutes after meals before deciding to hit the pantry again. Next, your body will try to keep up its sugar level, craving, smoking routine you have trained it into until it can adjust back in due course.

I wish I had known smoking was turning me into some kind of self inflicted diabetic and why quitting is causing me to feel peckish all the time. Forewarned is forearmed and I no longer reach for a cigarette any more now; I think on the knowledge, suck on a boiled

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sweet, pick up an orange or reach for an apple, then wait for twenty minutes.

You can find out how the body carries out the miracle of recovery at the excellent [www.whyquit.com](http://www.whyquit.com) website on this page [Stop Smoking Recovery Timetable](#)

Here is an extract accessed 28th November.

# 24 hours

Anxieties peak and within two weeks should return to near pre-cessation levels.

# 48 hours

Damaged nerve endings have started to regrow and your sense of smell and taste are beginning to return to normal. Cessation anger and irritability peaks.

# 72 hours

Your entire body will test 100% nicotine-free and over 90% of all nicotine metabolites (the chemicals it breaks down into) will now have passed from your body via your urine. Symptoms of chemical withdrawal have peaked in intensity, including restlessness. The number of cue induced crave episodes will peak for the "average" ex-user. Lung bronchial tubes leading to air sacs (alveoli) are beginning to relax in recovering smokers. Breathing is becoming easier and the lungs functional abilities are starting to increase.

Its working, one week in and some very weird things going on in my chest as my lungs start to throw out the rubbish again. Still ill, but the recovery path is getting smoother, starting to feel good about things too.

Take care

Max Crean

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[1] [2003, Joel's Reinforcement Library, "Minimizing the Most Common Side Effects to Quitting Smoking"](#)

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Update 25th April 2010

Not thinking about smoking any more, but I am powering up mountainsides on hikes.  
Recovery good

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Apparently my lungs have been scarred by years of smoking so are not as efficient as they might be. Doctor's haven't mentioned Emphysema but think damage to my heart and arteries are more or less inevitable, but mercifully tests show its going to be a while before it goes pop. :-)

The money I have saved so far has paid for a flight to the UK.

The routines and habits caused by cravings, shopping, self recrimination have been broken.

More even tempered now, the feelings of guilt for damaging my own body are receding.