


Preventing Slips—Quitting Smoking/Tobacco

About “slips” and “relapses” when you’re trying to quit:

Think of quitting as a process with ups and downs and learning opportunities.



- A slip, or lapse, is a return to the unwanted behavior (like smoking a cigarette after quitting). A slip doesn’t have to mean a full return to the old habits and practices (known as “relapse”) and can actually be a useful part of recovery.
- Slips are a normal part of changing any behavior, especially when the change involves overcoming an addiction. Though it is best to fully avoid slips, if and when they occur, the best response is to learn from the experience and get back on track as quickly as possible.
- Most people have slips within the first week, when they are still experiencing withdrawal symptoms. People who relapse after several weeks of not smoking usually don't do it because of nicotine withdrawal but because they find themselves in situations that make them want a cigarette. Learn to recognize when you might slip or relapse, and plan ahead to cope with those situations.

Slips/relapses are more likely to occur when...

- A person is faced with a situation that overwhelms the ability to use a helpful coping response in the moment. For example: you’ve been smoke-free for three days when you get into an argument with your co-worker or partner; you find a cigarette in a coat pocket and all you can think about is how mad you are and that you deserve and/or need to smoke that cigarette.
Tip: Having a plan and alternative coping responses makes it easier to stay quit.
- Having difficult withdrawals. This can also make it tough to stay quit in the first few weeks. There are medications that can help, along with coping responses like deep breathing, distraction, taking a walk, talking to a helpful person.
Tip: Learn about withdrawals and consider resources, like medication, coaching and more, to help.
- Someone thinks that all that’s needed is motivation/self-determination to quit. Though motivation is important to keep you moving forward with your quit plan, if you don’t have the skills, resources or support you need, you’re more likely to slip.
Tip: Learn about skills, resources and support available to help you quit. Thinking you have to do it perfectly, without any struggles or setbacks, can be a risk for slipping.

Supportive ways to deal with slips/relapses:

- Remember that quitting/recovery is a process and that slips are part of it.
- Reach out and get support and get back on track as quickly as possible.
- Don’t buy a pack (or buy a new lighter); if you do, get rid of it and get back on track with a plan.
- Be compassionate and gentle with yourself and think through what happened that contributed to the slip – consider what took you off track and what you’ll do next time.
- Look at your list of reasons for quitting to remember why you wanted to quit. Then take control again.
- Think about past situations when you were strong and resisted temptation.
- CELEBRATE along the way – even small steps lead to the destination!

Have a plan in place, and practice your healthy coping strategies.



Use the backside of this sheet to record your relapse prevention plan! →

Steps to plan for preventing slips/relapses:

Use this sheet to Identify your risks/triggers for slipping during the early stages of quitting (first 2-3 weeks) and later stages (3 weeks – 3 months). When possible, avoid the triggers. Have a plan for and alternate/healthy response for each of the triggers.

Plan for slips/relapses in the first 2-4 weeks:

Identify your risks/triggers for slipping during the early stages of quitting (first 2-3 weeks). Think about the times when you'll be the most challenged, like first thing in the morning, after meals, when around friends/family who smoke/use tobacco. Identify strategies that you *are most likely to use* instead of smoking/using tobacco, and don't forget to consider resources like nicotine replacement therapy and the QuitLine (1-800-QUIT NOW).

My triggers for smoking/using tobacco are:

Alternate coping response/supports include:

**Make a list of risky situations to avoid;
and identify healthy coping strategies to use.**



Plan for Slips/Relapses in the first 2-6 months:

Think about the situations in the months ahead that might be challenging and how you might either avoid them or use alternative coping strategies to manage these times. Remember, sometimes holidays, seasonal changes and other stressful events can pose unexpected challenges. Identify strategies that you *are most likely to use* instead of smoking/using tobacco.

My triggers for smoking/using tobacco are:

Alternate coping response/supports include:

For more help with relapse prevention:

Visit the Colorado QuitLine at www.coquitline.org or call 1-800-QUIT NOW