

## **Quitters Talk Back**

*Six ex-smokers tell how they quit*

Joanne Barker

It's getting more difficult to smoke cigarettes these days. During your workday, you may have to go outside and smoke in the wind and rain. Strangers may give you disapproving looks. Your own family may give you a hard time. Still, for many people, the hassles of smoking seem less daunting than trying to give up cigarettes for good.

Here are the stories of some smokers who gave up cigarettes. As you'll see, each person found his or her own way to quit. If you're tired of the inconvenience, the embarrassment, and the cost to your health and wallet, you may find these stories inspiring. These ex-smokers all found a way to quit.

So can you.

**Diane Cotting**, 49 years old, employee benefits planner, Boston, Mass.

**Smoking history:** Smoked from the age of 18 to 32

**How I quit:** "I was working second shift at GM on a line with six people, and we all decided we would quit together. The first day almost killed me. I was going crazy by the time I got to work that afternoon. Then the woman who talked us all into quitting walked in smoking a cigarette. We were so angry. But we'd made a pact to quit smoking, and the rest of us decided to keep it."

**Advice to smokers:** "Someone told me that nicotine cravings only last one to two minutes. Whenever I had a craving, I would watch the clock and wait for a minute or two to pass. Then I'd think to myself, 'Another one down.'"

**Best thing about not smoking:** "Freedom. It had gotten to the point where I couldn't go to a movie; I couldn't sit for two hours without a cigarette. Now I don't spend my days thinking about my next cigarette. I can focus on what I really want to be doing."

**Ted Brandley**, 60 years old, retired utilities lineman, Warwick, RI.

**Smoking history:** Smoked from the age of 14 to 34

**How I quit:** "I had tried to quit about a half a dozen times over the years, but it never lasted. The time I quit for good I was more determined. I knew something had to give because I was killing myself. I'd wake up in the morning and feel like someone had a foot on my chest. My lungs hurt all the time; it was hard to take a

deep breath. During the first couple of weeks after I quit I relied on hard candy and sugarless gum."

**Advice to smokers:** "You can quit. Thirty years ago when I worked on the utility lines, nine out of 10 guys smoked. Now it's one in 10. They all quit over the years. It is possible."

**Best thing about not smoking:** "Since I quit, when I wake up in the morning, my eyes fly open. I feel alive. I have energy. I don't feel groggy or drugged."

**Tammy Franklin**, 29 years old, independent beauty consultant, North Fond du Lac, Wis.

**Smoking history:** Smoked from the age of 17 to 29

**How I quit:** "I had tried to quit cold turkey, but I couldn't do it on my own. I found out the American Lung Association was giving away free nicotine patches, so I decided to give them a try. I would put one on in the morning and keep it on until I went to bed at night. When I had a bad craving, I would close my eyes and imagine myself smoking. Within three minutes, the craving would be gone, and I'd be more relaxed. I used the patch for six weeks. The information they gave out also really helped. By the end of that time, I didn't crave cigarettes anymore."

**Advice to smokers:** "Don't give up trying just because you haven't been able to quit before. Everyone is different. You have to find what works for you."

**Best thing about not smoking:** "Cigarettes always controlled me before. Now I'm in charge."

**Gerry** (not his real name), 41 years old, social services worker

**Smoking history:** Smoked from the age of 16 to 29 and again from 36 to 41

**How I quit:** "I had attended a class sponsored by the American Cancer Society. Even though I hadn't been able to quit in the class, the techniques they taught helped me when I quit. Each time I reached for a cigarette, I wrote down the reason I was smoking and taped all the reasons to my pack. This helped raise my awareness of why I smoked. It gave me the courage to examine my habit so that I could quit."

**Advice to smokers:** "Deal with quitting one urge at a time. You'll probably get overwhelmed if you think about not smoking for the rest of your life. As time goes by, it gets easier."

**Best thing about not smoking:** "This spring, I could smell the lilacs out in front of my house for the first time. I didn't even know what I was missing when I was a smoker."

**Monica Hamaty**, 31 years old, fund accountant, Quincy, Mass.

**Smoking history:** Smoked from the age of 13 to 26

**How I quit:** "I had been smoking half of my life by the time I quit. I realized the only way I would quit was by going cold turkey."

"One day I decided to give it a try. I made it through my workday without having a cigarette. I was really struggling that evening, so I went to bed early. The next day, my husband dared me to make it through a second day. We continued this routine for about two weeks until I didn't crave cigarettes any more. Five years later, I'm still smoke-free."

**Advice to smokers:** "I found that keeping myself busy helped get me through the urges. I chewed gum, especially after a meal. Exercising was also a big help; I didn't think about smoking when I was walking or riding my bike."

**Best thing about not smoking:** "I like not smelling like smoke. It didn't bother me when I was a smoker, but now I realize how bad it is. I feel healthier and I have more energy. I can go hiking and breathe easier."

**John LaBalbo**, 56 years old, works at the fuel desk at a truck stop, Albany, N.Y.

**Smoking history:** Smoked from the age of 15 to 55

**How I quit:** "I signed up for a Freedom from Smoking class through the American Lung Association. They told us about the health benefits of quitting, but I needed a more tangible reason to quit for good. Right around that time, the price of cigarettes went up significantly. I was so annoyed. The tobacco industry had been forced into a settlement with the government, and they were making us, the smokers, pay for it. I finally got mad enough to say, 'I am not paying these prices for cigarettes, period!'"

"I quit by tapering off the number of cigarettes I smoked. I would purposefully leave them at home when I went out. When I was at home, I left them in the car."

**Advice to smokers:** "Think about the money you're spending and what else you could be doing with it."

**Best thing about not smoking:** "I used the money I saved on cigarettes to buy a membership at the YMCA. I'm working out every other day now, and I can do so much more than before. I am amazed at how much stronger I've gotten."

### Sidebar: **Are YOU Ready to Quit?**

Knowing how ready you are to quit smoking makes a big difference in how successful you'll be.

**"I'm thinking about it."** This is a key step. Ask yourself these questions before you move on.

- Why do I smoke?
- How do cigarettes affect me?
- How does smoking make me see myself?
- How would I feel if I quit?

**"I'm getting ready to quit."** You're ready to start turning away from your habit. Think of healthier activities. If you smoke to relax, try exercise or deep breathing. Here are some other things you can do to get closer to your "quit day":

- Make quitting a priority.
- Take small steps. Cut back on the number of cigarettes you smoke.
- Set a quit date. Stick with it no matter what happens.
- Tell friends that you will be quitting and ask for their help.

**"I'm quitting now."** Be ready to face strong nicotine cravings. The worst urges usually pass within one to two weeks. Here are a few ideas to get you through the urges:

- Refocus your energy. When you feel like smoking, call a friend, take a walk, or try a new recipe.
- Relax. Find a quiet place, breathe deeply, and let go of the urge.
- Instead of saying, "I need a cigarette," stop yourself and say, "I would like cigarette." Saying no to your desires is easier than saying no to your needs.

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