

Smoking - Addiction or Habit?

By Gayle North

Do you smoke cigarettes? If so, do you believe that you are addicted to nicotine? It's a common belief.

Do you believe that if you weren't addicted to nicotine – it would be easier for you to stop smoking?

The US government commissioned a study on nicotine several years ago and the end result was a 600 page document written by leaders in the field of chemical addictions and do you know that not one of them said smoking was a chemical addiction? They all said things like, "It could be", "It might be." But not one of them said it was. That's kind of interesting isn't it?

I like to look at things from a behavioral point of view. If you compared smoking for example to heroin, there's a complete difference. A heroin addict for example, would experience some terrible withdrawal symptoms. They often experience things like sweats, shakes, vomiting, and hallucinations.

Smokers may get grumpy, lose their temper and overeat a little bit, but they don't experience the physical symptoms that are associated with a true drug addiction. For example the average heroin addict cannot make it through the night without their body waking them up for more heroin. The ones who manage to make it through the night are the ones who are alcoholics. The alcohol numbs the senses so that at least they get a full nights sleep. But when they wake up in the morning they have to have all the heroin they didn't get during the night just to get out of bed in the morning.

If smoking is a physical addiction, which means that your body needs it - why doesn't it need it during the night? Why does it only want to smoke during waking hours?

A few years ago the entertainer, Roy Castle, died of lung cancer brought on by breathing in cigarette smoke in the bars and clubs when he was playing his trumpet. The nicotine and all the chemicals were enough to kill him but weren't strong enough to addict him. There he was all those years breathing in all that nicotine but didn't want to smoke. However, if a person spent a considerable amount of time in opium dens – breathing that in – they would become addicted to opium.

So then – what is it? It's a habit. Now it may sound a little trite to say that it's just a habit. It is one of the most powerful habits that there are. When you wake up in the morning and you have that first cigarette, you are reinforcing the habit of smoking. Every time the hand goes up to the mouth – say ten times with every cigarette (that's maybe 200 times a day) you are reinforcing the habit. What else do you do 200 times a day? Nothing, except breathe. So it's a very powerfully conditioned habit.

Now some people point at this and say, "OK, it's a habit but why then do I get this craving? Surely habits can't do that!" The answer to that is, "Oh yes they can!"

You may know someone who has to answer a phone every time it rings. Some people actually feel bad if they don't answer it. Some people feel so strongly about it that when they are at a friends house, a ringing phone will drive them crazy to the point they have to answer it themselves. Now what's happening there? Is the person chemically addicted to the sound of the bell? No, of course

not, it's a habit that has been trained into them since they were a kid. So it's kind of like you have programmed into your nervous system that 20 times a day a bell will ring, and you are going to answer it and have a cigarette. If you don't answer it, it rings louder and that's what creates the anxiety (the craving). *The proof that it's the habit and not the nicotine is that when you are on the patches you can still get the same feeling. It can't be the nicotine – the patches are providing more nicotine than you would get in cigarettes.*

Another example is nail biting. People who come to see me for hypnosis to stop their nail biting tell me that they have all the "so called" withdrawal symptoms that someone who is trying to stop smoking experiences. They find that they lose their temper, get grumpy, and maybe even overeat. Does this mean that they are addicted to the taste of their nails or the chemicals in their nails? No of course not. It is a habit and so is smoking.

And the only reason you are still smoking is because there is a conflict between your conscious mind that probably tells you that you *should* quit, (you know as well as anyone all the dangers of smoking) - and your subconscious or unconscious mind that protects *all* of your habits from change. Old beliefs stored in your subconscious tell you that you need it for stress, or that you enjoy it – or any number of other excuses. Some of your deeper reasons for smoking may even be hidden from your conscious awareness.

In the next article we will explore how those excuses get created in the mind and different ways to change old unwanted habits.

Gayle North offers Personal Coaching for Positive Change using recently developed empowerment technologies to clear mental and emotional blocks that keep people stuck in unhealthy habits and prevent them from performing at their highest potential in school, sports, relationships, work and finance. Call 406-837-1214 to learn how you can STOP SMOKING IN ONE HOUR and for coaching in person or by phone.

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