

The Closet Smoker

"I can't come to the rest of the sessions. Nobody in my family knows I've relapsed and if I have to come here the next five nights, I will have to tell them where I'm going. I couldn't face them after that." I've had a number of past clinic participants who had relapsed and came to the first night of the clinic to tell me they were going to try on their own, without the support of the group and the rest of the sessions, solely to avoid the embarrassment of admitting their relapse. While some do quit after staying for the first session, others just continue smoking because they just can't seem to muster up the motivation to get through the initial stage of withdrawal on their own.

What follows for these closet smokers are lives complicated far beyond that of the potential life threatening health risks from smoking. More immediate of a risk is living a lie that places them in constant fear of being exposed. This will drastically reduce the amount smoked. The closet smoker will only smoke when the opportunity permits. But that means spending numerous hours every day, and possibly even entire days in a state of constant withdrawal. When they do get a chance to sneak a cigarette, what if someone sees them? What will that person think of them? Who else will they tell? Even if not seen, what about the smell? For a while the smoker may claim that the smell is from second hand smoke, but that just puts them deeper in the deception. If they do eventually get caught everyone will know that all the other times that they were being accused by some significant other, who thought they smelled it, that their denial then was a blatant lie too.

While some who are reading this may think, "Who cares what other people think," you should understand that to this kind of individual, others' opinion of the smoker's strength or integrity is extremely important. If it were not, they would not have faced the initial dilemma of how to come to the clinic without admitting the failure. They are stuck in chronic withdrawal and the chronic anxiety of being caught, all for the luxury of sneaking a cigarette here and there to temporarily alleviate withdrawal whenever possible. It is obvious that the closet smoker is not smoking for enjoyment. They can't enjoy it during the act because they're afraid of being caught. The reason for lighting any given cigarette is plain and simple - the nicotine addict is getting their much needed drug fix, a fix that would not be necessary if they would just quit smoking and end the vicious withdrawal cycle.

The only logical solution to this problem is to quit smoking. And

while the closet smoker may eventually be successful in quitting smoking, since they were already supposed to have quit, how will they then explain the serious mood swings and other physical withdrawal symptoms (including why they seem so irritable or maybe even irrational), during the first few days of withdrawal? While it may be embarrassing to confess, it is in all probability the best solution. Admit to relapse and find the time needed to get involved in a smoking cessation support group. Also, let people around you know what you are going through. Those closest to you can often be extremely supportive and understanding, but only if they know that their help is needed.

Once you do quit, do everything in your power to avoid ever having to go through quitting again. Smoking will be more expensive than you remember, more socially unacceptable, just as unhealthy and it could cost you your life. It may affect your social status, making many question your general sensibilities as well as your lack of concern for all non-smokers and ex-smokers around you. If you try to hide the fact that you relapse, you expose yourself to being caught and then viewed as a liar and a cheat, all for the "joy" of a nicotine fix. Never forget what each day was like when you were a smoker and it will make it much easier to always choose to never take another puff.

Freedom From Tobacco - Quit Smoking Now, MSN Group, Accessed August, 08,2004
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