

HABIT OR ADDICTION?

Knowing how many cigarettes you smoke each day and when and why you smoke them is just the first step to understanding your unique smoking pattern. The next step is to look at the cigarettes you smoke and decide what each cigarette is – part of your habit of smoking or part of your physical addiction to what's in the cigarettes. Put simply, the distinction between habit and addiction is the difference between desire and necessity. For most people, cigarette smoking is both a habit and an addiction. Still, knowing the distinction between which of your cigarettes are smoked due to habit and which are smoked due to addiction can help you design a more successful quitting plan that fits the way you smoke.

To decide whether you are smoking a specific cigarette because of habit or addiction, ask yourself whether you truly need to smoke a particular cigarette – or whether you just want it. For example, if your body is depleted of nicotine and has to have more nicotine immediately, that's addiction. That overpowering need for a cigarette often kicks in when a smoker wakes up in the morning after going without cigarettes all night or comes out of a three hour movie where smoking was not allowed.

On the other hand, there are certain times and places that create the desire for a cigarette in a smoker. And in those instances, smoking is optional. While the smoker may want a cigarette, he or she doesn't need to smoke at that moment. Those are habit cigarettes. Examples of habitual smoking are lighting up in the car automatically or reaching for a cigarette during a telephone conversation without thinking twice.

Will power is an important component in breaking smoking habits. However, will power often falls far short of helping a smoker master the addiction to nicotine. That's why an addicted smoker has a better chance of quitting smoking and staying quit if both medication and will power are used together as part of a divide and conquer strategy. With this two-pronged approach, will power works on the mind and cessation medications work on the body.

Some smokers choose to work to break their habit of smoking first – and then go to work on their addiction to nicotine. Other smokers work on both aspects at the same time – using will power to fight against their smoking habit and proven medications (like nicotine replacement products) to wean their bodies away from the nicotine addiction. Whichever strategy you adopt, it's important to understand the distinction between habit and addiction and to be willing to fight back on both fronts to become tobacco-free.

Some of the information in this handout comes from *Okay, Don't Quit: How to Stop Smoking without Quitting Cold Turkey* by James A. Davis. Web Site: www.awss.com/sm_03.htm
