

SYMPTOMS OF RECOVERY

By Patricia B.

What a paradox! You've quit smoking and you're supposed to feel better. And usually you don't.

Don't you hate that guy who has this SUDDEN BURST OF ENERGY, when all you want to do is SLEEP! And you're LAZY...and you're TIRED. Well, what Mr. Sudden Burst didn't tell you is that he has INSOMNIA! The guy with the 160 I/O (and that would be all of us with our cigarettes!) can't even add two and two. THINKING CLEARLY does return. CONSTIPATION, DIARRHEA, GAS, GASTRITIS are all part of the recovery process. This, too, will pass (pun intended).

Maybe your LUNGS HURT, your MEMORY DISAPPEARED. You say YOU CAN'T SPEAK CLEARLY? Neither do Barbara Walters and Tom Brokaw and they get a lot of money to do that. How's your eyesight? Can you SEE CLEARLY? Probably you can see that dish of candy right over there. Don't touch it! OVEREATING causes WEIGHT GAIN. Stopping smoking is non-caloric!!! And so are water and exercise.

Were you aware that you've been whitewashing your mouth for all those years? When you quit, your mouth gets a little uppity. So, it makes your GUMS BLEED, your THROAT SORE, and serves up a TASTE WORSE THAN LIVER! Chewing gum helps. Ultimately you get to throw that away too.

Weren't most of us in "pretty good health" before we quit smoking? So what's going on? I was healthy before and now I'm sick. I've got all the latest flus recently imported from the Orient (could we export our cigarettes to them?). Are you experiencing SHORTNESS OF BREATH, are you ANXIOUS? Did you suddenly become a WORKAHOLIC? Trust the process... these physical symptoms will gradually diminish. Practice your ILLEGIBLE HANDWRITING with those HANDS THAT YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH while you're recovering.

Once you've gotten through the physical side of giving up cigarettes, the emotional symptoms of recovery start to kick in. (We didn't say it was easy - WE JUST SAID THAT IT WAS WORTH IT!) We've given up something that has been with us most of our adult lives and, even though our logic says: "Jeez, it's about time, fool!", our emotions take over with "Gimmee back my cigarettes!! Now!!" When we DON'T TAKE BACK OUR CIGARETTES, we become ENRAGED, ANGRY (bordering on violence sometimes); we're RESENTFUL (especially towards smokers, those jerks!), we POUT because no one is pinning the Purple Heart on our jackets, we get ANXIOUS, LONELY (where is my best friend, Marlboro?), we're ENVIOUS (craving other peoples' smoke, even though they're jerks for smoking).

WE BLAME OTHERS ("If I feel like a victim, why can't I act like one?!) And we are SENSITIVE. Our feelings are very fragile now. It's best to let your family and friends (and your cellmates, in case your temper went too far) know what's going on. Tell people that you're hurting, or tell them you need to be alone - whatever works best for you.

Hey! I didn't know you cried! Now, it seems, that's all you do. Sound familiar? Some of us are AFRAID TO BE ALONE (back to that old question: "Where's my best friend, Marlboro?") Some are AFRAID TO ADMIT TO QUITTING FOR FEAR OF FAILURE. Some of us are DEPRESSED and SUICIDAL. Come to a meeting and share your feeling. We can all help each other.

A lot of "retired" smokers experience SMOKER'S DREAMS...and the sense of relief upon awakening to find out it was just a dream! Phew! The mind is a funny machine. THE THOUGHT OF HOLDING A CIGARETTE or BUYING A PACK JUST TO HOLD IT - these are common notions that whiz through the brains that have been fed a powerful drug for years. We nicotine addicts are a devious lot and we can rationalize anything to anybody, even: "SMOKING WILL FIX IT!" And it doesn't.

During your recovery, you will probably feel the need to SLOW DOWN A LITTLE. Then, months later, you might feel a little nervous about this "quitting thing". Have you ever tried to convince yourself that you could HANDLE THINGS NOW. That YOU'RE UNDER CONTROL and these cigarettes will just be a hobby - not like before. Guess what? You're A PUFF AWAY FROM A PACK A DAY!

Some of the real jittery times (other than the first days) are between three and six months and just before your year anniversary. A lot of us have talked about programming ourselves for failure for a lot of years, and wouldn't having a cigarette on your 364th day be appropriate?

There are so many good things about quitting: Physically, you get to BREATHE AGAIN, RUN AGAIN, CLIMB STAIRS, FORGET THAT WHEEZE. Maybe you'll even get that SUDDEN BURST OF ENERGY. Emotionally, we get to know ourselves. We get to find out who we've been hiding behind that smoke for all these years. We're glad you're recovering. PLEASE PAT YOURSELF ON THE BACK!!!

These symptoms were collected and
compiled at SMOKER'S ANONYMOUS* meetings
1985-1986

* Name changed to Nicotine Anonymous in 1990