

Kicking Addictions

Chicky Mama

I just did not like *having to have something*. Then, there was the all-important health issue that drove me to quit.

So, you have many reasons to quit smoking or drinking caffeine or (fill in the blank). You want to improve your health or live longer, save money, or just don't want to be in the grips of any addiction? This advice will work for many vices, not all. If you are addicted to meth or heroin, this advice will not help.

Tom, my boss and friend had to leave meetings, cut them short, skimp on training sessions and succumb to his smoking habit quite a few times each day. After I had known him for four years, he decided to quit smoking. We only saw each other ten months out of the year, so I was not aware of his summer progress. One day in the fall after school started, he had to go smoke. I was stunned because he had told me he was quitting six months earlier.

Tom explained his process: Every morning, the first thing he did was put his feet on the floor and light a cigarette. He explained that his feet had to be on the floor to avoid going back to sleep with a cigarette in his mouth. He said he was so eager to smoke that he reached for the cigarettes and lighter as he was sitting up. Every morning when he started quitting, he smoked. He noted the time he smoked the first day. Let's say 5:18 am. The next day he had to wait until after 5:18 to have the first cigarette of the day. He waited longer if he could but did not try to wait hours, just minutes to have the first cigarette of the day. The second day his first cigarette was at 5:20. The third day at 5:21. He continued his very slow progress, minutes at a time. He was able to wait more minutes each day, sometimes less. So, slowly but surely, he started his smoking day later and later, spending more hours not smoking.

The day I talked to him after school started, he said he had to wait until 2:14 pm for his first cigarette of the day. He said when the day came that his first cigarette of the day was just before bedtime, he would have successfully and painlessly quit. As far as I know, he never started smoking again.

This goes against everything we know about the first day of a new habit or the first day of quitting a habit. We all get up in the morning, weak of body after our fast. We have set our minds to forcing our body and mind to do our will. How many people have quit smoking multiple times only to fall back in our old habit within hours?

I was having anxiety attacks, I thought. I suffered, I was trying to go to grad school, work, drive 2 hours to campus, and generally care for myself, my car, my house, and study. Caffeine fortified me. Caffeine cleared my head when I was muddled. Caffeine caused my heart rate to hover right around 110 all the time. I was alert. I excelled in school. Finally, my heart was racing and irregular.

Then, the day came that the pounding in my chest frightened me. The decision to give up caffeine was easy. But, how? I would almost go to sleep driving if I needed caffeine. I had a real problem. But, I remembered how Tom quit smoking and never went back.

I planned this carefully. I started my quitting on a day when I did not have papers due soon. I did not have a heavy driving schedule. Starting on the perfect day was part of my success.

When I awoke each morning, I had a routine: go to bathroom, start a bath, get a Coke out of the refrigerator, get in the steaming tub, lie back and drink my Coke. It was a ritual I enjoyed and needed.

The day I started quitting there were Diet Cokes and Caffeine Free Diet Cokes in the refrigerator. That first day I had my Coke first thing in the morning. Then, I had one around noon, another at 3 pm or thereabouts. Another was necessary around 7 or so. Often, I would have another at midnight.

Yes, that Coke at midnight caused me to awake many times during the night to go to the bathroom. Often, I would have chest pains along with the elevated heart rate. So, I knew it was time for a change. I was wearing out my heart!

The first day, I had all but the last Coke at 7 pm. Now, I was drinking from 2 liter Cokes, so there was not just a glass of Coke imbibed. The last drink of the first day was a Diet Coke. There were no headaches or jitters.

The second day, I had all the Coke I wanted until it was time for the late afternoon/dinner Coke. The rest of the day I drank Diet Coke Caffeine Free. No problems

The third day, I opened my last Coke at around noon. I drank Diet Coke Caffeine Free Coke for the rest of the day. No regrets.

The fourth day, I had only a morning Coke, the last with caffeine. Diet Coke Caffeine Free satisfied me the rest of the fourth day. I was free. No headaches plagued me.

The fifth day, I only had Diet Coke Caffeine Free. It was several years before I even had the occasional Coke with caffeine.

Now, I should give up Coke altogether.

Everyone assured me before I started giving up Coke I would be plagued with headaches because of the volume of Coke I consumed, all full of caffeine.

I have always drunk tea without sugar or any artificial sweetener. I actually like the taste of tea. However, a few years before I gave up Coke, I gave up caffeinated tea. I use Lipton Decaffeinated Instant Tea now. Yes, I know, but it is an acquired taste. When I

divorced, I could not drink all the tea I brewed, cannot stand refrigerated tea, and will not drink tea left out on the counter. So, I make it a glass at a time.

I try not to eat so much chocolate that my heart races as before. Chocolate is where I get my caffeine these days.

You can adapt Tom's and now my method of beating addiction. You may have noticed that he did without at the beginning of the day, and did without at the end of my day. You can adapt it to most addictions.

Your turn

Do you have a habit that you think can be adapted to this method of quitting habits? What addiction plagues you? Which addictions have you quit?

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