

by Hemant Ramtirth Goswami

Observing the pin-headed insects, man recognized that all insects do their best to keep away from the crop of tobacco. Using this knowledge that tobacco is not liked by insects and pests, tobacco and its constituent, nicotine (C, H, N) has been used as an insecticide.

But unfortunately it was also realized that tobacco can be used as an intoxicant too. The addictive nature of tobacco added to its abuse and this characteristic was fully exploited by man; resulting in tobacco being turned into cigarettes and later into many other different kinds of products ensuring the addictive nicotine kick.

Slowly but steadily smoking grew into a fashion statement and before the dangers of tobacco were widely known, about half of the male adult population was in its grip. By year 2000 tobacco was responsible for killing one person every five seconds. Since it was addictive in nature, commercial organizations selling it found it to be an ideal product to earn quick money, as a smoker compulsively consumed many cigarettes (and packets) every day.

Governments too saw



Why and how to QUIT smoking

Quitting this deadly addiction is tough, but achievable. Here is how

the money making potential. It was promoted most aggressively as a lifestyle product. Tobacco was glamorized to an extent that in the early and mid-19th century, smoking was a tacit must for every person who wanted to project

himself as aristocratic, rich, intellectual, social and modern. This trend still continues and every hour around 5,000 youngsters become new tobacco addicts somewhere in the world.

Persisting myths

But why is tobacco bad? So what if I smoke a few cigarettes a day? How

dose it matter? These innocent questions are asked many times by ignorant tobacco users and this also shows that the dangers of tobacco are not fully comprehended by most people. Well, nobody drops dead after smoking. People may die of some heart ailment, cancer, lung problem, etc and the death certificate will list the disease and not tobacco as the cause of death.

Yet, smoking is responsible for about half of all heart attacks and cardiovascular deaths; 30% of cancer deaths and 87% of lung cancer deaths each year. Tobacco is directly responsible for the death of half of its lifelong users, taking an average of 14 years off their lives. Over 90% of patients with oral cancer use tobacco by either smoking or chewing it. Smokers have a 16 times greater risk of developing peripheral vascular disease (PVD) (blocked blood vessels in the legs or feet) than people who have never smoked. Smokers are more likely to develop a cerebral thrombosis (stroke) than non-smokers. About 20% of all stroke deaths are estimated to be smoking related. The risk of dying among smokers from TB is about 400% higher than the non-smokers with TB. Contrary to the macho image projected by tobacco companies, research has showed that there is a 50% increase in the risk of impotence among smokers compared with men who had never smoked.

"I am 39, am smoking beedis for the last 21 years and am still alive!" Mahant Prasad argued. Well, of the 4000 different chemical compounds in tobacco about 60 % are clearly known to be carcinogenic (cancer causing), including arsenic, benzene, chromium, nickel, vinyl chloride, cadmium, formaldehyde, Carbon monoxide, Nicotine, Nitrogen oxides, 2-nitropropane, Hydrogen cyanide, Ammonia, Dimethylamine, 2,5-dimethylamine, Ethylamine, Methylamine, Methylpyrazines, methylpyridines, Pyridine, Pyrrolidine, Trimethylamine, Hydrazine and Acetal-dehydeacetone.

Well, it might cause cancer but not heart attacks, somebody may argue. Wrong. Highest numbers of smokers die because of cardio-vascular diseases. Cancer is second in the cause of death of tobacco users. Why? Smoking causes heart disease by narrowing the blood vessels, making

cholesterol more likely to be trapped in the lining of the blood vessels, increasing blood pressure, increasing the chance of blood clotting. Cigarette smoke also contains carbon monoxide. The molecule of carbon monoxide binds more strongly to the haemoglobin in the blood and thereby reduces the supply of oxygen. This can result in sudden blockage of an artery, causing a heart attack or stroke which is fatal or will have severe after effects.

"Can I smoke a mild or light cigarette? Paryag Mehta, 16, asked me. But I smoke only two cigarettes a day. I don't think it will cause any harm?" Vikas Kalra looked reassuringly at me. Such questions keep on coming at our workshop for young people aged between 10 and 18. Unfortunately, a mild or light smoke is a myth. All youngsters when they start tobacco, they start with one (harmless looking) puff; then one stick, followed by one more and eventually it reaches a stage of addiction.

"One has to die one day so how dose it matter if I die because of tobacco related disease or otherwise?" Ashish Malhotra questioned me. Dear Ashish, have you not seen anyone dying because of cancer? Do you realise the suffering caused to the family, even financially? It is said that with one cancer patient the whole family dies many times. What right do you have to cause your family such suffering? What good will it serves if you die 15 years too early? Wouldn't it be a loss to your family, friends, associates, society and the country?

Besides, only 15% of the smoke from a cigarette is inhaled by the smoker; the rest goes into the surrounding air and other people, including your family members, breathe it in. Passive smoking can result in increase in tobacco related diseases for your family.

Tobacco results in irreversible damage to babies and children who are exposed to cigarette smoke. WHO

estimates that nearly 700 million, or almost half of the world's children, are exposed to tobacco smoke by the 1.2 billion adults who smoke. Children with a parent who smokes have more chest, ear, nose, and throat infections than non-smokers' children. Children exposed to smoke are more likely to develop breathing problems as adults. Unborn babies of pregnant non-smoking women are also at risk if the women are exposed to passive smoking. Research also shows that young people are three times more likely to start smoking if their parents smoke, which is a tacit approval.

How to quit

The benefits of quitting are many for the tobacco user as well as his family. When smokers give up, their risk of getting lung cancer starts decreasing, so that after 10 years an ex-smoker's risk is about a third to half that of continuing smokers. If one quits smoking before 50 years, it decreases risk of premature death by 50% in the next 15 years than those who don't. Cardiovascular risk becomes equal to non-smokers in just 2-5 years. Just after 72 hours from quitting smoking one can feel the results; walking becomes more effortless, one would be able to walk longer distances without losing breath. The sense of taste will start returning. Foul smell from the clothes and mouth will go.

But how to quit tobacco? No doubt it is addictive and habit forming but by nature's grace man also possesses the greatest will power among all animals; the power to control one's mind. There are no foolproof methods of quitting tobacco till date. Though many medicines, gums, nicotine patches, etc. are available but it's more a matter of one's own will power and a desire to quit than anything else. The success rate of tobacco cessation clinics is less than 10% but there are also countless cases

of people who have quit without any assistance and have never again touched tobacco. Many are now anti-tobacco campaigners. When you decide to quit keep in mind that the work it takes to quit smoking is a small price to pay for the benefits you'll enjoy once you're free of this awful addiction. Your life will improve beyond your expectations.

Remember it takes just 72 hours to get out of the addictive trap of nicotine and after that it is just a question of not getting tempted again and falling back into the death-trap. Plainly speaking; after 72 hours, it is just breaking the habit/routine.

As there are five steps to addiction (You took time to get hooked; from the first harmless looking puff to packs of cigarette), similarly there are five initial steps to quitting. But remember, the starting point is **YOUR SINCERE WILL TO QUIT.**

Step 1: Quit now

Don't fool yourself by saying that you are reducing and are now smoking just 1/2 sticks a day. If you have to quit, you have to quit altogether. Cutting down is not a step to ceasing to smoke. Throw the pack in your hand and declare **I QUIT NOW.** Keep the promise you make to yourself.

Step 2: Fight the urge to smoke for the first 72 hours

If you can do this, half of the job is done. The withdrawal symptoms are at their peak during the first 72 hours. Besides the withdrawal symptoms of nicotine addiction, you also have to fight the habit of holding a stick on certain occasions and lighting it. Many thoughts were previously sheltered by the act of lighting the tobacco stick; it was many times used as a decision stalling tool/tactic and even to hide



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nervousness. Understand this and resist the urge to use cigarette as a tool of such thoughts. There shall also be a lot of spare time available now. This can, and will, give you a feeling of emptiness and uneasiness. You have to handle it too. How? Sit down, deliberate and develop a strategy which suits your nature and temperament.

Step 3: Fill the spare time

You are going to get the urge to do something in the now available spare time or on moments when you used to light a stick. Simply plan an alternative activity (Suggestion: you can spend a little more time with your children; on the net surfing about your hobby related stuff, develop your reading habit, etc.). Plan an activity which keeps your hands busy. You can also use any chewing gum or your favorite sweet, take out a gum stick and chew if you ever get an urge to smoke. Keep

them in stock as you used to keep cigarettes. Break your routine and do the things according to a new routine. Try different flavours of chewing gum, drink fruit juices/newer variety of tea/coffee or simply keep some dry, non-fatty snacks for munching.

The urge to smoke/consume tobacco after having your food should be countered by eating something else, which you like. You can also plan an activity immediately after taking your meals so that you are not left with any spare time at that moment. This initial urge to smoke after meals will fade within 15 days. It is more of a habit. Similarly the routine of lighting a cigarette while in the toilet also has to be countered; this habit too will take some time to break. One can carry a newspaper/book etc. to the toilet. Remember, tobacco does not facilitate excretion, it's only a myth.

Consuming tobacco is also related to pleasure by many; this is solely because when we are participating in pleasure activities or enjoying something we have ample time in hand and most of us often indulge in some kind of secondary activity at such times. This secondary activity is also labeled and registered in our mind as a pleasure giving activity whereas it is not. Now if you understand the design of it, do not fall into this trap of misunderstanding the secondary activities as the one giving pleasure. Anyhow, if you must indulge in any alternative secondary activity, develop a new one to suit you.

Step 4: The company of friends

Avoid moving with your friends (who smoke) at such times when they usually light up, like at lunch hours, tea breaks, etc. Don't take offence when someone makes fun of you for not smoking. Don't get instigated. It is tough and you may be labeled a

hypocrite but do not allow anyone to smoke in your office/home/car and in your presence. Learn to take a stand. IT HELPS. If anyone offers you a cigarette, refuse politely but firmly. If the other person insists, take a stick, break it into pieces and throw into the bin. This act will make a strong statement and also ensure that you are not offered a cigarette again. May sound harsh and impolite, but then easy ways often fail.

Step 5 : Not even a puff

At no stage get instigated or break your resolve. A single puff can do irreversible damage. Behave like a normal non-smoker and a misocapnic (a person who hates tobacco smoke). Don't let trivial comments bother you. Don't enter into any kind of debate. Become a part of anti-tobacco campaign and see that other youngsters do not get into the tobacco trap. Help others to come out of the tobacco trap; be a mentor for them. Be committed to the issue and share your mistakes with others. Tell them how easy it was to get in and how difficult to come out. And yes, get a general overall medical checkup done to make sure you came out at the right time.

CONTINUE YOUR RESOLVE AND HELP OTHERS QUIT

Here are some more tried and tested tips from some successful ex-smokers. May be you will find them useful:

- Quit now. Don't postpone. Do not cheat yourself by saying : Let's

have one last Should I quit another time? Should I start quitting tomorrow? Should I have just one cigarette a day?

- If you want to take some time, fix a date and do not overshoot the deadline. It is better that you write the date on a card along with the reason why you want to quit and the things you hate the most about smoking. You can write as many points as you may wish.

- People who quit with a healthy support system in place have a much higher rate of success over time. So share your intention to quit with a person who is a non-smoker, preferably a family member or a friend who has been asking you to quit. Whenever there is a weaker moment, just talk to the person and share your thought.

- Remind yourself that you have no other option but to quit. And when you have no options there are no questions of debating about anything. Decided to quit and it is final.

- Never think that I am no more addicted to tobacco and so I can smoke one. Strict No. Remember it started like this. You always thought that you are not addicted but somehow it got hold of you. Don't even think. Remember; a relapse always begins in the mind.

- Most smokers tend to put on weight while giving up smoking, so watch your diet and do not start eating rich foods. If you gain weight, don't start dieting immediately. Wait until you have succeeded in giving up smoking first.

- Do not neglect your diet. Drink a lot of water and eat a balanced diet. Avoid fried food.

- Do not try to blackmail your loved ones during emotionally weak times by threatening to smoke again.

- Do not try to count days or remember the date of quitting. If you quit, the date you bid goodbye to tobacco is not important. That you finally got rid of the habit is more important. Remembering the date is like trying to keep the hope alive that you will smoke one day.

- Live in today. Do not think about tomorrow. Quit and live your promise one day at a time. Do not work for the next day.

- Think about all of the positive changes you're creating in your life. Successful long-term cessation always starts in the mind. Focus on your purpose of quitting. We have a way of believing what we tell ourselves over and over, so don't feed yourself with negative thoughts. Affirm the changes you are working to create in your life, and action will follow more easily.

- Add a new activity like exercising, evening walk, running, playing a new game, etc. to your daily routine.

Withdrawal isn't a totally pain-free experience, but it is survivable and it is certainly short-lived. Always keep in mind the fact that withdrawal symptoms from nicotine are a temporary condition and remember that you are quitting tobacco for a reason. □

Chandigarh-based, Hemant Goswami is the chairperson of Burning Brain Society (BBS), which is working against tobacco use among youngsters. The advocacy and activism by BBS recently resulted in some big tobacco companies to drop their promotion tactic of targeting youngsters. The society uses a multi-pronged approach to tackle the tobacco menace: educating youngsters through seminars and workshops, and bringing the government and bureaucratic apathy to the forefront.



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