

Nicotine and Tobacco Addiction Examined

By Jim Rachels



Nicotine is the chemical in cigarettes that keeps you addicted and coming back for more. The more and more you smoke cigarettes or chew tobacco you get a good feeling. It releases chemicals such as dopamine in your brain that helps add to this feeling. Whenever you smoke you only feel these effects for a little bit and that is what keeps you coming back for more. There are many ways to ingest nicotine. There are vape pens, cigarettes and chewing tobacco to name a few.

Cigarette smoking and general tobacco use are extremely bad for your health. Here are some statistics from the CDC:

Cigarette smoking causes about one of every five deaths in the United States each year.^{1,6} Cigarette smoking is estimated to cause the following:

- More than 480,000 deaths annually (including deaths from secondhand smoke)
- 278,544 deaths annually among men (including deaths from secondhand smoke)
- 201,773 deaths annually among women (including deaths from secondhand smoke)

Cigarette smoking causes premature death:

- Life expectancy for smokers is at least 10 years shorter than for nonsmokers.
- Quitting smoking before the age of 40 reduces the risk of dying from smoking-related diseases by about 90%.

I think a major problem with cigarette addiction issues is that people don't really classify it as a drug, it's considered more of a bad habit. I think we need to wake up and see this as a drug just like every other one out there.

Nicotine Anonymous was founded in 1982 with the mission of getting people off of cigarettes using a 12-step program and method. But even with this I still don't hear people talking about nicotine being a drug just like cocaine or heroin. Both will hurt you and both can eventually kill you. I was a smoker for many years. And as I smoked like anyone else I never actually looked at and classified my cigarettes as drugs, it was just a bad habit.

So how do you know that you've become addicted to nicotine? The first symptom is pretty straightforward and easy, you can't stop when you try at first. That is then typically followed by cravings for a cigarette. And just like any other addiction, you can't stop despite health problems going on

as a result of smoking. Just think about the fact that cigarettes have been linked to cancer and people are still smoking despite all the warnings out there, it just doesn't make sense. But then again the things we do in active addiction don't typically make any sense either.

Let's take a look back and examine the history of tobacco and how it has changed into many forms for people to take which in all situations causes negative health effects.

Tobacco use can be dated to over 8,000 years ago. It even has roots here in America with the native American population using tobacco for more than a millennia. It was used for all types of things such as helping with wounds and for pain relief. It was also used in religious ceremonies and things such as sharing a peace pipe. At this point in history people we're not really getting as addicted because there were no companies around adding nicotine and other things to their products.

In 1492 when Columbus landed in America he was greeted by the Native Americans that were already living there. With this, they were brought many gifts such as maize(corn), fruit and even spears. Another thing they brought was dried-up tobacco leaves.

This is around the time that Europeans were first introduced to tobacco products. Tobacco became popular around the world. Eventually, Portuguese travelers were planting crops of tobacco out of their trading outposts for personal consumption and to also trade with people for other goods and services.

In the 1900s tobacco became more of a commercial product sold to people all over the world. With this, the companies started adding more and more nicotine to keep their customers coming back. Also around this time many new cigarette makers and companies were being formed all around the United States and the world.

Just talking about tobacco in America it mostly took off during the Revolutionary War. Eventually, in 1776 it was also used as collateral for the loans of the French at the time who we owed money to for their assistance in the war.

Moving forward to 1847 which is the year Phillip Morris was started in the UK. They were the first company to start selling pre-rolled cigarettes to the masses. Then in the States, a company name J.E Liggett and Brother was the first one to start selling cigarettes in the US. At that point in time chewing tobacco was still the main way to use tobacco but that was slowly changing over to smoking tobacco.

Cigarettes eventually became the most popular form of using tobacco around the time of World War 2. US soldiers were given rations such as food and nutrients and the other part of the ration pack was cigarettes.

The dangers of smoking have been long documented.

From tobaccofreelife.org:

“In the early 17th century a Chinese philosopher Fang Yizhi pointed out the dangers of smoking, noting that it caused ‘scorched lungs’.”

So no matter what the cigarette companies were saying it has been long known that smoking can be terrible for one's health. It was just a very well hidden and not often talked about fact about smoking. Many cigarette companies touted the benefits of smoking for many different things. This was all a complete and utter lie as it was known back then that cigarettes are not good for anybody's health no matter what is said.

So why are people still smoking despite the well-known negative consequences of smoking? I think many people first try cigarettes to be “cool” and fit in with a certain crowd. I also think many people turn to cigarettes because of anxiety that can have been caused by a number of things. Once you build up your habit it is not easy to quit.

So what happens when people decide that they no longer want to smoke or use any type of tobacco product? What happens is withdrawal symptoms just like you get when using any other type of drug for prolonged periods and then try to quit. These withdrawal symptoms occur because your body has gotten used to having nicotine in its system. Once you suddenly take away the nicotine your body will start craving it. Again this is just like any other drug that you take and get used to after using for long periods. Some of the symptoms you feel are difficulty concentrating, increased appetite, sleep troubles, depression and irritability. I'm sure that there are also other people out there that experience different things because everyone's experience is unique to them. Another thing that will vary is how long your recovery takes and how long the symptoms keep going. Usually, the symptoms are strongest for the first few days to maybe a few weeks. But then they slowly start to subside and not be as strong as they once were. Again the amount of time this takes to happen will vary from person to person.

So what are some of the ways people are using to quit? For me, the first thing that I really believed helped me was using a nicotine patch. Since nicotine is the main thing that keeps you addicted to cigarettes it is not a bad idea to ween yourself off of the drug. I slowly used the patches as directed and slowly weened myself off tobacco. Another thing that is part of quitting smoking is the habit and routine that has formed around cigarettes. I know for me the first cigarette of the day got me going, or at

least I thought. Also when I used to get in my car I was used to lighting up a cigarette on the way to work. There were also specific times of the day when I was accustomed to smoking. So stopping and changing the routine was also part of my recovery from nicotine and tobacco. It's not just about the nicotine it has a lot to do with the routine you formed over the years of smoking and now you need to break this bad habit as well.

Nicotine and tobacco are extremely harmful substances yet they are still sold all over the world just like liquor. This is something the recovering addict must face. They must face the fact that everywhere they go in the world they are going to be tempted by liquor and cigarettes. People need to get used to being around this stuff without cravings arising. It is a difficult task to accomplish but it can be done.

There are many types of help available such as patches, gums and even certain prescription medications are known to help with the cravings. You can also consult with a therapist about ways to help your smoking habit. You just need to find which route is best for you. For some, this might mean going cold turkey as they might not believe in taking anything to help with quitting smoking. Everyone's recovery is unique to them and each of us needs to choose the best path possible if we want to truly quit using tobacco products and stay clean from them.

It is ultimately your choice about which route you take but just know that there are all these tools and resources available. Just know that all you have to do is ask for help.