

Inova TobaccoNET

Dealing with a Lapse

Some ex-tobacco users “lapse”. They find themselves in a high-risk situation without a plan of action. The stress may build and they find themselves tired, anxious, and irritable. They may think, “Just one cigarette won’t hurt, and it will help me cope.” In the past this difficult situation would have been handled by using tobacco but now new coping skills must be identified and used.

Lapses happen! They are mistakes. A lapse may consist of one puff, two to three cigarettes, or you may use tobacco for a day. The lapse becomes a relapse if the person gives up, stops trying, and returns to the old comfortable tobacco lifestyle.

It is important to plan ahead for high-risk situations. Many people who are quitting may at some point smoke a few puffs, no matter how determined they are not to. The most important part of the lapse is not the lapse itself, but how it is handled so that it doesn’t become a **relapse**.

Here’s how to handle a lapse:

1. STOP USING TOBACCO IMMEDIATELY

- Throw away all of your tobacco
- Call someone to help you get back on track if needed.
- Change your surroundings, if possible, by leaving the situation.
- Go for a brisk walk or to another room.
- Think of all your reasons for not using tobacco and imagine yourself handling this situation without it.

2. THINK!

- What happened that led up to the lapse?
- What was going on?
- Where were you?
- Who were you with?
- What were you doing? -- feeling? -- thinking?

3. RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEM

- Ask yourself how it felt to take those few puffs or that dip:
- Was it what you thought it would be?
- Did it help?
- Did you feel better, or worse?
- Did it make the problem go away?
- Did you try any other ways to cope?

4. DECIDE!

- How will you handle the problem next time?

5. DON’T FEEL GUILTY!

- Learn from the lapse and let it go.
- People make mistakes.
- Don’t let a mistake lead you to give up.
- Remember, you haven’t failed until you stop trying.