

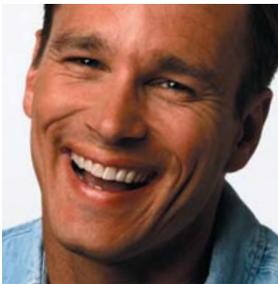
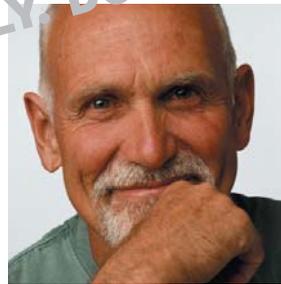


FOREVER  
*FREE*™

A Guide  
To Remaining  
Smoke Free



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Smoking,  
Stress, & Mood

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*This is the sixth booklet in the Forever Free series. This booklet covers the link between stress, mood, and smoking. It focuses on why stress and unpleasant moods can make you want to smoke. It also lists some ways to deal with stress.*

## What Causes Stress?

Stress is what we have when life gives us challenges. There are many ways that we may be challenged. Perhaps we have to change the way we live (like when we get a new job or have a baby). Perhaps we have to solve a problem (like finding ways to pay bills). Perhaps we have to get a task done in a short amount of time (like when the boss wants our report first thing in the morning). Perhaps we have to make a hard choice (for example, whether or not to have surgery). When we are challenged we may have stress. These challenges are called *stressors*.

Stressors come in all shapes and forms. Major events that happen to us are one type of stressor. The list below shows some types of major life events that most people would find stressful.

### Some Major Life Events (Stressors)

Death of a family member.  
Jail sentence.  
Partner is not faithful.  
Bankruptcy.  
Fired from job.  
Miscarriage or stillbirth.  
Divorce.  
Unwanted pregnancy.  
Serious illness.  
Demotion.  
Lawsuit.  
Poor grades.  
Fights with boss.  
Move to a new place.  
Menopause.  
Retirement.  
Child leaves home.  
Birth of child.  
Marriage.  
Pregnancy.

Note that “good” events, such as marriage can also be stressful, because people need to adjust to something new.

## “Even happy events can be stressful.”

But you do not have to have any of these major life events in order to have stress. Life is full of daily hassles that cause stress. **Hassles** are those things that happen on a regular basis. The list below shows a few examples of these. In the blank lines at the end, fill in some of the “hassles” in your life.

### Some Daily Hassles

- Minor money problems.
- Car trouble.
- Rude people.
- Fights with partner.
- Traffic jams.
- Bad weather.
- Home repairs.
- Arranging childcare.
- Housework.
- Loud children.

### Add your own daily hassles:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

*In the long run, these daily hassles account for more stress than the major life events.*

## What is Stress?

You probably know the answer to this question. What do you feel like when you are under stress? You may feel overwhelmed. You may feel tense. Perhaps you find that your heart beats faster and you sweat more. You may get an upset stomach or a headache. As you worry about the stressor, you may start to feel anxious or depressed. As the stressor keeps on going, you may want to find some way of getting away from it. Smokers may begin to have an urge for a cigarette.

People differ in how often they deal with stress, and how they react to it. Some people have more stress in their lives than others. Some people also react more to stress than others. And some people are better than others at dealing or coping with stress once it starts.

People who have trouble dealing with stress often have strong emotional reactions to stress. Their mood is easily affected by events in their lives. They may be more likely to feel sad and anxious in response to events. In some people, their moods are so serious that they suffer from depression and anxiety. (Not all depression and anxiety are caused by stressful events, but stress does cause or worsen a large part of such problems.)

## How Is Stress Related to Smoking?

People who have a lot of stress tend to have a harder time quitting smoking. This is also true for people who are prone to negative moods, such as sadness and anxiety. We also know that when ex-smokers start smoking again, they often have their first cigarette in response to stress or moods (see box on next page). People who are depressed are twice as likely as others to be smokers. They also have a harder time quitting and saying quit.

Why is this? Think back to when you were a smoker. When you had stress or frustration, what did you do? When you were feeling down or bored, what did you do? When you were nervous, what did you do? Chances are that you smoked. Most smokers learn to use cigarettes as a way to deal with stress.

## What Leads Up to A Cigarette?

What leads ex-smokers to have their first cigarette? We followed a group of ex-smokers after they quit, and then asked them if and when they had a cigarette. Here is what the ex-smokers told us about what events led up to that cigarette.

<u>Events</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Unpleasant Mood	70%
Drinking Alcohol	47%
Happy Mood	24%
Eating	12%
Offered Cigarette	2%

You can see that the most common event leading to smoking was being in a negative mood, such as feeling sad, tense, angry, or bored.

## Why do smokers deal with stress by smoking?

The answer to this question is not really known. However, we have some good ideas. Nicotine causes the brain to release chemicals, called neurotransmitters. Some of these chemicals, such as beta-endorphin and norepinephrine, can cause a person to feel better, but only for a short time. They can improve your mood for a while. So, smoking can serve as a quick “pick-me-up.” Indeed, nicotine is a stimulant, which is why a smoker’s pulse gets faster after a cigarette.

Aside from this chemical reason that smoking might seem to help someone who is under stress, there are also other reasons. Smokers often use the act of lighting and smoking a cigarette as a “time out” from thinking about or dealing with stress. Like any activity, smoking can distract a person from his or her troubles. Because smoking is often a social activity, some people find that lighting a cigarette brings to mind feelings of group support. This can comfort people in times of stress. Lastly, an addicted smoker will feel better after smoking because it relieves nicotine withdrawal symptoms.

## So, Why Not Smoke When Stressed?

**There are many problems with using cigarettes as a way to cope with stress or other unpleasant feelings:**

- The relief only lasts a short time. Soon your stress will return and you will need to smoke another cigarette.
- Smoking does not solve your problem; it only hides it. The cause of your problem remains.
- Smoking is not a healthy way to deal with stress. The stress probably will not kill you, but the smoking may. (See Booklet 5: *Your Health*.)
- Smoking actually causes more stress than it relieves. Studies show that stress levels go down after quitting.
- After you quit smoking, you may have trouble dealing with stress and bad moods. If smoking was your main way of coping with stress, you will need to find new, better ways after you quit.

## Better Ways to Deal with Stress and Negative Moods

Most people, of course, are able to deal with stress and negative moods without smoking or using other drugs or alcohol. How do they do it?

### 1. Deal with the Problem

One good way to cope with life's challenges is to try to deal directly with the problem facing you. Look at the source of the problem. Think about ways to solve it, and then act.

*Tiffany had quit smoking 6 months earlier. Today, on the way to work, her car ran into a guard rail. There was much damage to her car's front end. That day, Tiffany felt very stressed and anxious. She was worried that she would not be able to afford to have the car fixed, and that she would have no way to get to work. She thought about having a cigarette, which was how she used to calm herself down. Instead, she decided to try to find solutions to her problems. First, she found a co-worker*

*who would be able to give her a ride to work while her car was being fixed. One problem solved. Next, she called her insurance company and found out that they would cover the repairs, except for a \$500 deductible. She didn't have \$500 at hand, so she had to figure out how to get it. She decided to borrow some money from her parents, to hold a garage sale that she had been planning for years, and to delay buying some new clothes. This was not an ideal answer, but it did allow her to repair her car and get back to work. She solved the problem without smoking!*

## 2. Do Other Activities

There are other things besides smoking that can reduce stress. These include: reading, exercise, relaxation, deep breathing, prayer, meditation, or taking a walk. All of these can take your mind off of a stressful situation. They also can improve your mood.

*Larry was one of those smokers who lit a cigarette when his mood was not good. When something the least bit stressful happened, he would reach right away for a cigarette. After he quit, he had urges to smoke when he felt stressed or down. He quickly found out that he needed to come up with something that helped him feel the way he did when he smoked. He came up with the idea of doing deep breathing exercises. The deep breathing was like smoking, and it also let his body relax. When he felt tense, this is what he would do. He would close his mouth, relax his shoulders, and inhale deeply while counting to eight. Then he would hold his breath for four seconds. Next he would exhale slowly while counting to eight. Larry found that if he repeated these steps five times he would feel relief of stress and tension. It worked at least as well as smoking used to.*



## 3. Talk to Someone

One of the best ways to deal with stress is to talk to someone. Most of us do this, by talking to friends, family, or co-workers.

*Whenever Janice felt stressed, she would phone her best friend, Alice, and they would talk about her problem. Sometimes they were able to come up with good answers to the problem. But, even when they could not solve it, just talking about it helped Janice.*

Other people like to join a support group. Often the people in a support group have the same types of problems, and they can help each other out.

*When Bob was diagnosed with skin cancer, he felt overwhelmed. This was the worst thing that ever happened to him. He did not know if he was going to live or die. He did not know what the treatment was going to do to him. He was anxious, depressed, and afraid. His doctor suggested that he join a support group for cancer patients. At first he did not like the idea because he was never the kind of person who liked to talk about his problems and fears. Finally, he decided to give it a chance. At first, Bob was pretty quiet during the group meetings. But he felt that he was learning a lot about cancer and cancer treatment by listening to the other members talk. Later he became more active in the group himself. He found that he was not alone with his fears. He also found that he felt better after talking. Bob then began to help new members of the group.*

Some people have very strong reactions to stress. They suffer from mood problems that get in the way of their lives. These people may benefit from seeing a health professional such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker.

*Alex seemed to be living under a cloud. He could not remember the last time he was happy. The best he ever felt was neutral. Any kind of problem or stress seemed to make him feel sad or depressed. He had felt this way for quite some time, but it may have gotten worse since he quit smoking last year. He was having a hard time getting out of bed in the morning. There seemed to be nothing that he liked any more. At times he had thoughts about killing himself, but he did not really have the energy for that either. (Besides, he did not think that suicide would be fair to his family.) On the advice of his doctor he entered therapy with a psychologist. This has helped him to look at the causes of his depression. Together they are working on changing the way that Alex looks at the world, which should help relieve his depression.*

Besides therapy, a doctor may prescribe medication as part of treatment for depression, anxiety, or other psychological problems.

## 4. Accept Temporary Stress

A certain amount of stress is a part of life. Success at quitting smoking may mean simply getting used to what stress feels like without smoking. You will learn that the feeling of stress will pass on its own even if you do not have a cigarette. Because smokers often have a cigarette when they feel stressed, they may forget that these feelings will get better on their own.

### Look at Your Life

The methods just listed should help you deal with stress in your life. But another way is to change your lifestyle to reduce the number of stressors. Is your life more stressful than it has to be? Clearly, there are some stressors that people may have little control over. However, many types of stressors result from choices that we make about our lives. Ask yourself if there are ways to reduce the stress in your life. Ask yourself if there are ways to get more good things from life. Here is just one example from one of our clients:

*After Steve quit smoking, he figured that it was a good time to take a look at the rest of his life. He was so proud of himself for quitting that he now felt that he could make other decisions that might improve his life. The main conclusion that he reached was that he was not spending the time with his family that he would like. He felt that he was missing much of his children's childhood years. Steve realized that he had become a "workaholic" in his effort to succeed. His job required long, stressful hours. During the little time he spent at home he was too tired to have fun with his family. But he decided to change. He looked for other jobs that would need less hours. After a couple of months he found a job that needed only 40 hours per week. He quit his current job to take the new one. This let him spend time after work and on weekends with his family. Steve found that he was much happier than before, and felt a lot less stressed.*

Of course, there are a lot of other ways to reduce stress in your life. Watch for the next *Forever Free* booklet, which will discuss "positive addictions."

## Notes:

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