

Give It Up! Stop Smoking for Life

Anne Mitchell

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If quitting cigarettes were as easy as starting, most smokers, having learned about the health risks, would simply stop smoking.

But there's nothing simple about quitting, as the author readily acknowledges. She doesn't claim to have tried everything before stubbing out her last cigarette, but her list conveys that impression. What kept her going as her failures mounted was her ability to remain positive, to focus not on the relapse at the end of several hours of abstinence but on the several hours of abstinence. Failures and frustration help Mitchell, an artist and intranet developer in Ohio, to bring compassion and understanding to her writing.

Her book is well conceived and well written, and she has translated successfully the most pertinent medical literature. She contends that whatever method of quitting one chooses, success will depend on developing a new belief system, and on recognizing that the decision to quit must be emotional as well as rational.

As Mitchell argues, reason and logic have little to do with either starting or stopping smoking. After early health scares, the tobacco industry introduced "light" and filter-tip cigarettes, hinting that they are less dangerous. The ploy worked. Many smokers were dismissive of health warnings, like Rose Cipollone, who, in her 1988 suit against Liggett, told the court that she hadn't been seriously concerned about the health risks, because "if there was anything that dangerous" the tobacco people wouldn't allow it and the government wouldn't let them?" Some smokers naively feel the same way—how could it be legal to sell a product that, used as directed, kills the user?

Accompanying the book is a CD recording of stories told by cancer survivors, by relatives of smokers who did not survive, and by persons who have tried to quit. Stories like these, Mitchell says, are crucial in developing the necessary belief system and in "internalizing" a new way of thinking about self-destructive behavior.

Some young people have chosen to smoke because of the tobacco industry's skill at recruiting customers. Its advertising is relentless and highly sophisticated. Children have been routinely targeted as tobacco companies' most desirable "replacement" smokers—replacements, that is, for adult smokers who have quit or died. Women are targeted, too. Some researchers believe that young women are more susceptible to advertising than men are, and that women become addicted more readily and find it harder to quit than men do.

Mitchell speaks to both men and women, but especially to women, who are more vulnerable to the harm of tobacco use in ways that are not yet clearly understood. She points out that lung cancer now strikes more women than breast cancer. But since this book went to press, a team of British endocrinologists has reported findings that strongly suggest a causal link between tobacco use and breast cancer. Thus do reasons for quitting multiply as smokers struggle to quit. This book can help.

HAROLD CORDRY (September / October 2002)

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