

Integrating hypnosis into treatment for habit change: smoking cessation

List the positives

First make a thorough and comprehensive list of all the positive things you get from smoking. For example, it gives you a break from work, it gets you outside, it provides alone time, it's a distraction, it helps your concentration, it helps suppress appetite, it feels good, it relaxes you, it soothes your nerves. Every positive function smoking provides should be acknowledged and understood, so that a healthy alternative replacement that provides this function can be developed.

Develop a compelling positive motivating image

Develop a vivid, coherent and compelling image of what life will be like as a non-smoker. The second law of hypnosis states, "When will and imagination are in conflict, imagination always wins." If you are trying to use willpower to stop smoking, but your imagination is full of vivid images of how good it would feel to smoke, success is unlikely. If your imagination is full of compelling images of what your life will feel like as a non-smoker, it's a fair fight and will is in service of imagination, not in conflict with it. This approach uses the development of a set of positive images to pull you into healthy living, which works, and does **not** use fear-based reasons to stop unhealthy behavior, which doesn't work.

Some examples are walking comfortably, having energy, enjoying the taste of food, playing with the grandchildren, feeling good, feeling successfully out of the grip of an addiction – the content matters less than the vividness of the images and their power as motivators of your decision to free yourself from the addiction and live a healthy life.

Develop your list of suggestions

Make a list of the suggestions you would like to receive deeply in your mind that will help you (1) automatically re-organize your identity as a non-smoker, and (2) effortlessly and comfortably resist the occasional urge to resume your old habit, whether for the chemical support of nicotine or the psychological familiarity of the smoking ritual. Your therapist can use these in your hypnotic sessions, and you can use them as mantras in your self-hypnosis and self-suggestion. These should ideally be personal and detailed. Some examples include, "I'm asking my unconscious mind to block awareness of the nicotine craving for two weeks," "I can feel more and more comfortable and relaxed with my ability to enter into trance even while I function normally at work," "I can remember my powerful motivation to defeat this enemy and protect my precious health whenever an urge arises," and "Every urge that arises can automatically trigger my awareness of my ability to self-soothe with trance." The more the suggestions are linked with powerful personal motivators, the more effective they are likely to be.

Replace positive functions with new behaviors

Developing specific plans for every positive function of smoking is essential to success, and sometimes the development of replacement rituals is helpful. Some clients have responded positively to the idea that smoking is a primitive form of meditation, which often stresses mindfulness of breathing, focusing on the inhaling and exhaling of air as an exercise in centering and focusing the attention, much as the smoker relaxes by focusing on the inhalation and exhalation of smoke. Replacing smoking with a mindfulness-of-breath mediation is a good example of a positive replacement behavior.

Say goodbye gratefully

Enjoy your last few smoking experiences in this light, appreciating the value smoking has provided, and preparing to say goodbye to the good friend it has been. Smoking mindfully and appreciatively (rather than ambivalently, furtively, numbly or guiltily) changes the relationship to smoking and prepares for the transition to becoming a non-smoker.

Scheduling for success

You should plan a session or two to get the plan organized before the quit date, and a session or two right around the quit date will help with support and shoring up any unanticipated difficulties, with a session or two a week or two out from the quit date and one a month or so out to reinforce and measure success.

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