



# COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

*Bringing the University to You*

---

Fact Sheet 98-89

## SMOKE-FREE & FIT Goal Setting and Preparing To Quit

David Christy, Dr. P.H.  
Health and Prevention Specialist

Making any change in lifestyle can be very challenging. The addictive nature of nicotine adds to the challenge as one gets ready to quit smoking. To meet the challenges of quitting the nicotine habit, one often sets high goals, then becomes discouraged if those goals aren't met. The stress level goes up; self-esteem sinks as one feels he or she is "bad" for not meeting what is often an "all-or-nothing" goal.

To make the lifestyle change process easier and less stressful, and increase the likelihood of ultimate success, there are several goal-setting strategies that can help as you get ready to quit smoking.

### ***Strategies for Success in Preparing to Quit Smoking***

#### **1. Set specific goals for yourself.**

By setting specific, short-term and long-term goals that you can measure, you can experience success very early in the process of quitting. As you make the goals specific and measurable, be sure to make them attainable, too. What are some ways to set goals?

**Break large goals into small steps, and make them behavior focused.** By focusing on specific behaviors, and setting intermediate goals, you have more control over the outcome and success in reaching your overall goal. If your goal is, for example, "I am going to stop smoking," there are no intermediate steps at which you can experience success. An intermediate goal might be, "I am going to increase the time between cigarettes by 10 minutes each day." This is measurable, focused on behavior, and leads to the goal of quitting.

**Make them attainable.** If your goal is realistic, your likelihood for success increases. For example, if you are getting ready to quit and make your goal to "be smoke-free starting tomorrow," it might not have the same effect as a goal of "being smoke-free for the next 24 hours." (At the end of 24 hours, you have experienced success and have the option to set a goal to be smoke-free for another 24 hours if you choose.)

## **2. Build on past successes.**

We often don't give ourselves credit for getting where we are in life. All of us have experienced successes (and failures) along the way. By building on past successes, we become empowered to become successful as we work toward our goals. You can build on past successes by:

**Reviewing events, goals or challenges.** What has challenged you in the past? How did you deal with it? What made you successful in meeting the challenge? An example could be that your goal was to be able to use a computer, and now you do. This was something that took practice, and at which you experienced success.

**Relating past successes to your current goal(s).** Knowing that you were successful in the past gives you a foundation to think positively about the challenge you are facing now. Using the "computer example" from the previous paragraph, you might consider, "I learned to use a computer, and I did this by gradually learning to do one task, then another. If I set intermediate goals as I quit smoking, I am sure I can accomplish them one by one."

## **3. Focus on improvement NOT perfection.**

Perfectionism often leads to feelings of failure. After all, if you can't "just stop smoking" like one of your friends or relatives did, you are just a failure, right? Wrong! Just because one person quit "just like that" doesn't mean that is how it works for you. By focusing on improvement, you might make your goal to delay your first cigarette of the day by a half-hour each day. Though you haven't stopped smoking (perfection), by the end of a week you are smoking fewer cigarettes than you were seven days ago (improvement). Avoid the "all or nothing" rule.

## **4. Keep a written record of your goals and progress.**

Simply writing down your goals increases your likelihood of success. When you also keep a record of your progress, you can actually see the steps you have taken, and check them off as you succeed.

## **5. Don't forget to reward yourself!**

Even if an accomplishment seems small, rewarding yourself for your success reinforces the fact that you are successful. How do you go about rewarding yourself? The following might help:

**Rewards may cost very little or nothing at all.** Rewards don't have to cost a lot. They also don't have to be in the form of food (which might add to possible weight gain). A reward can simply be setting aside money you would have spent on cigarettes to purchase something you want or would like to have. Another type of reward might be to set aside time for yourself to do something you don't feel you have the "luxury" to do otherwise.

**Be sure to include "progress" in your definition of success!** Remember perfection and the "all or nothing" rule? By making progress or improvements, you are successful. Reward yourself for it!

## **6. Recognize and manage the cues around you.**

Whether we realize it or not, we are bombarded with cues every day that make us think about a certain behavior - in this case, smoking. Places, activities and even people can be environmental cues for us. For example, driving in the car (both a place and an activity) can be a cue to light up a cigarette. When you get together with a specific friend or group of people, you might feel like lighting up with them. These cues "trigger" behaviors like smoking. So how do you manage these cues?

**Recognize your own personal cues or triggers.** By recognizing what triggers you to smoke, you are better able to plan how to handle it when it happens.

**Manage through planning.** Make it easy to do what you want to do, and harder to do what you don't want to do. If driving in the car is a trigger, set a goal that you will not keep cigarettes in the car. Managing a cue might be avoiding a situation or person entirely, at least for a while.

**Plan how you are going to handle a cue or trigger before it happens.** When you are in the midst of a strong trigger to smoke and you have no plan, it is often hard to resist the cue. Think of a situation that might trigger you to smoke, then decide specifically what you will do when you are in that situation. You might even decide on a number of things you could do. Write them down, have them handy, and refer to them as you face that cue.

### **7. Ask for support from friends, family and co-workers.**

The likelihood of success increases when you are supported in your decision to quit smoking. Most people you know want you to be successful. Ask for their support as you quit smoking. If you know someone who also wants to quit, support each other. Just as it often is easier to exercise when you do it with someone else, quitting with a partner can make it easier to end the cigarette habit.

### **8. Think smart!**

It is easy to get into "thinking traps." Since thinking guides behavior, we all need to "listen" to what we are telling ourselves and avoid the traps. What are some of the traps to look out for?

**Inflexible thinking.** The "all or nothing" rule applies to our thinking. For example, "I will never go bowling (or be in an environment that triggers me to smoke) again." That rule can set you up for failure.

**Irrational beliefs.** Just because something affected you in the past doesn't mean it has to continue to affect you now. You might say, "I have tried to quit before and failed. I'll never be able to quit." Remember, quitting takes practice. You have had other successes on the road to quitting. In fact, just having tried to quit is an accomplishment!

**Expecting failure.** This is related to the last trap. By saying, "I will not be able to quit smoking," you are making a decision that you won't be able to quit.

**Blaming others.** Be reasonable in the amount of control you assign to yourself and to others. Blaming others ("I had to smoke because my spouse or partner was smoking") puts one in the role of "victim," somehow powerless to make a different decision.

Quitting smoking is probably the single most important thing you can do for your health. Quitting is not easy, but it is possible to do. Millions of people have taken the same road you are getting ready to take, and have been successful. Remember that quitting takes practice. Setting realistic and measurable goals, building on past successes, planning what you will do in the face of a trigger before it happens, and rewarding yourself as you accomplish your goals, will all help to make the final goal of being smoke-free easier and less stressful.

---

[Smoke-Free & Fit - Breaking the Barriers](#)

[Smoke-Free & Fit - Goal Setting and Preparing To Quit](#)

[Smoke-Free and Fit - Weight Management After Quitting Smoking](#)

[Smoke-Free & Fit - Eat For Good Health](#)

UNIVERSITY  
OF NEVADA  
RENO

The University of Nevada, Reno is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, creed, national origin, veteran status, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation, in any program or activity it operates. The University of Nevada employs only United States citizens and those aliens lawfully authorized to work in the United States.