Slips and Relapse: Learning from Them and Getting Back on Track

Slips

A slip is when you have a cigarette or two after you have quit smoking. It is not uncommon for people who are trying to quit to have an occasional slip. Because smoking can be so automatic, you may not even be consciously aware that you've smoked until after you've finished.

A slip or two does not mean that you have failed. If you slip, the best thing to do is to keep it minor, and go back to quitting as soon as you can. Look at what led up to the slip and figure out how to handle it differently next time. A slip will not prevent you from quitting successfully – you just have to get back on track.

Tips for Preventing Slips

- Reinforce why you want to quit.
- Continue positive self-talk; do not get discouraged.
- Get help and support from friends.
- Ride out the temptation; the urge passes quickly.
- Look at what caused you to smoke and how you plan to get back on track.
- Develop a plan to deal with the situation in the future.

Relapse

A relapse is when you start smoking again on a regular basis. A relapse will not prevent you from quitting successfully. Quitting smoking is a process and most people make more than one quit attempt before they quit for good. Don't feel discouraged. As long as you learn something positive each quit attempt, you will be further ahead than before you made the attempt. Relapse only becomes a negative thing if you let it get you down.

How to overcome relapses

- Do not beat yourself up
- Think of the relapse as a learning experience and one more step in your journey to becoming smoke-free.

- Be proud of the time you were smoke-free.
- Start planning a new quit attempt right away, including developing a plan to prevent relapse.

Plan to Prevent Slips and Relapse

The key to staying smoke-free is to be aware of the people, places, situations, thoughts and emotions that trigger you to smoke. Then plan ahead what you will do to cope with each trigger. You may have to keep thinking about your triggers for a long time after you quit because some situations, especially unexpected ones such as crises, can catch you by surprise. If you figure out ahead of time how you will deal with difficult situations, you are more likely to stay quit.

This is how it works

Identify your high-risk situations.

Identify ways you could cope with each trigger situation and write it down. Keep this as a written action plan. Try to think of a three-way strategy for each situation:

1. **What will you tell yourself?** It helps to have this written on a small card that you carry with you.
2. **Who will you ask for help and what type of help can you ask for?**
3. **What will you do?**

Rehearse each situation ahead of time so it doesn't feel awkward. Rehearsing puts your coping plan in the front of your mind.

Review the plan often to keep it fresh in your mind.

When you find yourself in the trigger situations, put your plan into action.

Write down what happened and how you did with a daily record form. If you resist the urge to smoke using your plan, your confidence will go up and you will know what strategies work for you. If you can't resist the urge to smoke, review what happened and revise your plan to deal with the difficulties.

Source: Adapted from materials from Health Canada's www.gosmokefree.ca and Capital District Health Authority.