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NATALI GORODNYUK

STOP SMOKING!

10 HARMFUL THOUGHTS
WHILE QUITTING



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thoughts while quitting

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Аннотация

What if quitting smoking starts with changing the way you think about it? This book explores 10 harmful thoughts that keep smokers trapped in dependence — and shows how to let them go and finally break free.

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Introduction

Anyone who has ever seriously thought about quitting smoking has probably experienced an inner dialogue that feels a lot like a battlefield.

On one side, there is the desire to break free from the addiction — to become healthier, stronger, and more independent. On the other, there is an endless stream of thoughts that seem determined to keep you exactly where you are.

Here are some of the most common ones:

“I smoke because I enjoy it. It is my only comfort.”

“I will never be able to handle the withdrawal if I quit.”

“I will end up smoking again anyway, so why even bother starting?”

“If I do not smoke, I will not be able to concentrate.”

“I already know how to quit. I have done it three times.”

These thoughts appear in the minds of countless smokers. Over time, they can become invisible chains, keeping a person trapped in addiction.

But what if we stopped treating these thoughts as facts?

What if we looked at them instead as beliefs, assumptions, and ideas — things that can be examined, questioned, and taken apart? What if we could understand where these thoughts come from, what keeps them alive, and what lies behind them?

And what if we discovered that holding on to some of these

beliefs is not actually helping us at all? In fact, some of them may be actively working against us.

This book is about the way our thoughts influence our behavior — including the way they influence our dependence on smoking.

We often think that quitting smoking is simply a matter of willpower. In reality, it is much more complicated than that. Quitting involves a whole system of interconnected factors, and our thoughts are far from being a minor part of the equation.

This book is a practical tool for dealing with an enemy that is difficult to see.

Smoking is not just a behavior that you can decide to stop one day and simply leave behind. It is a complicated combination of physical dependence, learned habits, and emotional rituals. To understand why quitting can be so difficult, we need to look at all of these pieces together.

In this book, we will examine ten fundamental thoughts that can have a powerful influence on the way you experience the process of quitting smoking.

Why ten?

The honest answer is that I do not particularly enjoy writing very long books. It is much easier for me to break my ideas into logical pieces and turn each piece into its own book. So, for now, you get ten.

In this book, we will also spend quite a bit of time talking about the physiology of smoking and the way nicotine affects

the process of quitting. Understanding what is happening in your body can make the whole process much easier to understand — and, hopefully, a little less frightening.

So, are you ready to take a closer look at your addiction and understand what is actually keeping you stuck?

Then let us begin.

Harmful Thought #1: “Why should I care what is happening in my brain? Knowing all this will not help me quit smoking.”

When you quit smoking, understanding what is happening inside your body is just as important as knowing why you should treat a cut with antiseptic.

Imagine that you cut your finger. If you know there is a risk of infection, you will probably clean the wound with antiseptic, put on a bandage, and keep an eye on it while it heals. Why? Because you understand what can happen if you do nothing. Bacteria can get into the wound, inflammation can develop, and in the worst-case scenario, the infection can spread throughout your body.

Now imagine that you know absolutely nothing about bacteria or infections. You might look at the cut and think, “It is nothing serious. It will heal on its own.”

And maybe it will. But it might also become infected. Complications can develop, and what started as a small cut can turn into a serious problem.

The same thing happens when you do not understand how your addiction works. You may start to believe that quitting smoking is simply a matter of willpower.

But addiction is more complicated than that.

It is a complex process involving the chemistry of your brain.

Nicotine essentially “takes over” certain receptors in the brain.

These receptors are designed to respond to acetylcholine, one of the brain’s naturally occurring chemical messengers. With repeated nicotine exposure, the brain adapts to the presence of nicotine, and its normal functioning changes.

If you do not understand how addiction develops and how the brain begins to recover after nicotine is removed, you will naturally rely on your own assumptions about what your addiction is and what you need to do to quit.

And just as with the untreated cut, that can lead to a rather unpleasant outcome: being unable to stay away from cigarettes, repeated relapses, emotional ups and downs, and eventually giving up on trying to become a nonsmoker.

Understanding the physiology of addiction helps you act consciously rather than emotionally.

You become the accountant of your own brain.

You reduce nicotine — you increase acetylcholine. We will talk about exactly what that means below.

It is like accounting: money comes in, money goes out. You keep track of what is happening instead of getting carried away by emotions.

That is it. No unnecessary drama.

Now let us take a closer look at how nicotine addiction develops, what happens inside the brain, and how the brain can

gradually return to normal.

So, What Is Actually Going On in the Brain?

Our brain is home to an enormous number of “friends”—neurons.

Neurons are brain cells that help us think, feel, remember, move, and do countless other things. Like true friends, they are constantly communicating with one another, sending messages back and forth.

How Do Neurons Communicate?

Imagine that neurons are friends who communicate by sending each other “letters.”

These letters are called neurotransmitters.

One of these neurotransmitters is acetylcholine.

Acetylcholine helps neurons pass information from one cell to another. For example, it can be involved in sending the message that tells your body to raise your hand, or in processes involved in learning and remembering something as simple as the multiplication table.

Think of acetylcholine as a letter carrying an important message.

The letter travels from one neuron to a receptor on another neuron. The receptor is like a mailbox waiting to receive it.

The acetylcholine fits into the appropriate receptor, delivers its message, and the neuron responds.

This is part of how your brain normally functions.

What Happens When You Smoke?

When a person smokes, nicotine enters the brain.

Nicotine is a substance that essentially tricks the brain by mimicking acetylcholine.

The brain does not simply look at the molecule and say, “Wait a minute, this is an impostor.”

Nicotine is similar enough to acetylcholine that it can bind to certain receptors that normally respond to acetylcholine.

In other words, nicotine shows up at the mailbox wearing a disguise, and the mailbox accepts it.

The neurons begin receiving nicotine where they would normally receive their “native” acetylcholine.

At first, this can even make a person feel good or relaxed.

Why?

Because nicotine does more than simply imitate acetylcholine. It also affects other systems in the brain and can trigger the release of additional “rewards,” such as dopamine, which contributes to feelings of pleasure and reinforcement.

Imagine that acetylcholine is an ordinary letter.

You receive the letter, read the message, and carry on with your day.

Nicotine, on the other hand, is like a letter that looks almost identical — but when you open it, there is a bright, shiny gift card inside.

Of course, that gets your attention.

But there is a problem.

The gift card is fake.

And the more often you receive it, the more your brain begins to expect it.

Why Does Nicotine Become a Problem?

If you continue smoking, your brain gradually adapts to having nicotine “available.”

The brain is an extremely efficient system. If something is being supplied from the outside, it starts adjusting its own work accordingly.

Why make something yourself if someone else keeps delivering it?

It is like a factory.

Imagine that your brain is a huge, highly organized factory. Under normal conditions, the factory produces everything it needs to keep its systems running. Acetylcholine is one of the substances involved in that normal operation.

Then nicotine starts arriving from outside.

At first, the factory is surprised: “What is this?”

But nicotine keeps coming.

Eventually, the factory begins to think, “Why should we keep producing as much of our own supply? The deliveries are coming regularly.”

So the factory starts changing its production.

The brain adapts to the constant presence of nicotine, including by changing the number and sensitivity of certain receptors. Its normal balance shifts because it has learned to function with nicotine in the system.

It is as if the factory has become dependent on an outside supplier.

And this is where the problem begins.

Over time, the brain becomes accustomed to nicotine being there. When nicotine suddenly disappears, the system does not immediately know how to operate normally without it.

Imagine that your factory suddenly loses its supplier.

There are no more deliveries.

And now there is a second problem: the factory has already scaled back some of its own production and has changed the way it operates because it expected those deliveries to keep coming.

So what happens when you suddenly stop smoking?

The brain starts to “panic.”

There is no nicotine coming in anymore, but the brain has not yet fully returned to its previous state.

It is as if the factory has been left without both its regular production and its outside supplier.

And that is when the person may begin to feel terrible.

Irritability can appear. Headaches can occur. Concentration can become difficult. You may feel restless, anxious, uncomfortable, or as if something is simply missing.

This is what we call withdrawal.

And here is the important part: these feelings do not mean that you are weak.

They mean that your brain has adapted to nicotine and now has to adapt again to its absence.

How Does the Addiction Become Stronger?

Every cigarette reinforces this cycle.

You smoke because your brain “wants” nicotine.

And your brain “wants” nicotine because you keep giving it nicotine.

The cycle feeds itself.

Over time, it can become difficult to tell where your own desire ends and the addiction begins.

You may think, “I really want a cigarette.”

It feels like a personal decision. A preference. Something you have chosen.

But there is another way to understand what is happening.

Your brain has learned to expect its regular dose of nicotine, and it is sending you increasingly strong signals to get it.

It is not simply you deciding, “I would like to smoke.”

It is the factory demanding its delivery.

And the more often you give the factory what it demands, the more firmly the system learns to expect it.

What Happens When a Person Quits Smoking?

When a person decides to quit smoking, the brain begins the process of returning to its normal way of functioning.

The nicotine deliveries stop.

No more outside supplier.

No more cigarettes bringing nicotine into the system.

Now the brain has to gradually relearn how to function without nicotine.

At first, this is difficult. The person experiences withdrawal symptoms because the brain has not yet had enough time to adapt to the new situation.

But gradually, things begin to change.

The brain adjusts to the absence of nicotine. Its natural systems begin to recover, and the changes that developed in response to repeated nicotine exposure gradually move back toward normal.

Remember our factory?

The factory has lost its outside supplier, but that does not mean the factory is permanently broken.

It means the factory needs time to restart its own production and adjust its machinery.

At first, everything feels chaotic.

Then, little by little, the system gets back to work.

The brain becomes increasingly capable of functioning without nicotine, and the intense need for nicotine gradually decreases.

It is like learning to write your own letters again instead of depending on someone else to write them for you.

You may have forgotten how to do it efficiently.

At first, your handwriting is terrible.

But the more you practice, the easier it becomes.

Eventually, you no longer need the outside service at all.

Why Is It Important to Understand This Process?

When you understand that nicotine addiction is not simply a bad habit, but a complex process involving your brain, it becomes easier to deal with it.

You know that feeling bad after quitting is not proof that you cannot live without cigarettes.

It is not proof that you need nicotine.

And it is not proof that something is wrong with you.

It is your brain adjusting to a new reality.

The discomfort of withdrawal is part of the process of your brain adapting to life without nicotine.

This distinction matters.

If you do not understand what is happening, you may interpret withdrawal symptoms emotionally:

“I feel terrible, so I must need a cigarette.”

“I cannot concentrate, so I must be unable to function without smoking.”

“I am so irritable that I cannot possibly quit.”

But when you understand the physiology, you can look at the same sensations differently:

“My brain is adjusting.”

“This is withdrawal.”

“My system is recovering.”

“This feeling will not last forever.”

You are no longer fighting an invisible enemy without knowing what it is doing.

You know what is happening.

You know why it is happening.

And you know that the process has an end.

Every minute, every hour, and every day without nicotine is another step toward allowing your brain to function without it.

Nicotine addiction can be overcome.

Your brain has an extraordinary ability to adapt and recover, and every day without cigarettes gives it another opportunity to restore its natural balance.

Once you understand this process, quitting smoking stops looking like a chaotic battle in which you simply have to overpower yourself.

Instead, it becomes a conscious journey toward freedom.

And that changes everything.

Harmful Thought #2: “I Smoke Because I Like Smoking.”

At first glance, this statement seems perfectly logical.

Smoking is often associated with certain pleasures: taking a break from work, relaxing during a stressful situation, or spending time with friends. We tell ourselves that smoking is a pleasure, a habit, a ritual.

But if we look a little deeper, we begin to see something important: we do not smoke only because we enjoy it.

Very often, we smoke because we want to avoid the unpleasant sensations that appear when our brain does not get the nicotine it has come to expect.

Let us take a closer look at why this thought is only partly true, and how nicotine affects the body.

How Does Smoking Become a “Pleasure”?

When a person first starts smoking, the first cigarette can bring real pleasure.

Nicotine reaches the brain and triggers the release of dopamine, a chemical messenger associated with pleasure and reward. That feeling can become stored in your memory, creating a positive association with smoking.

For example, your first cigarette with a cup of coffee or at a party may become an especially vivid moment. Your brain remembers it as something pleasant and begins to look for a way to experience that feeling again.

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