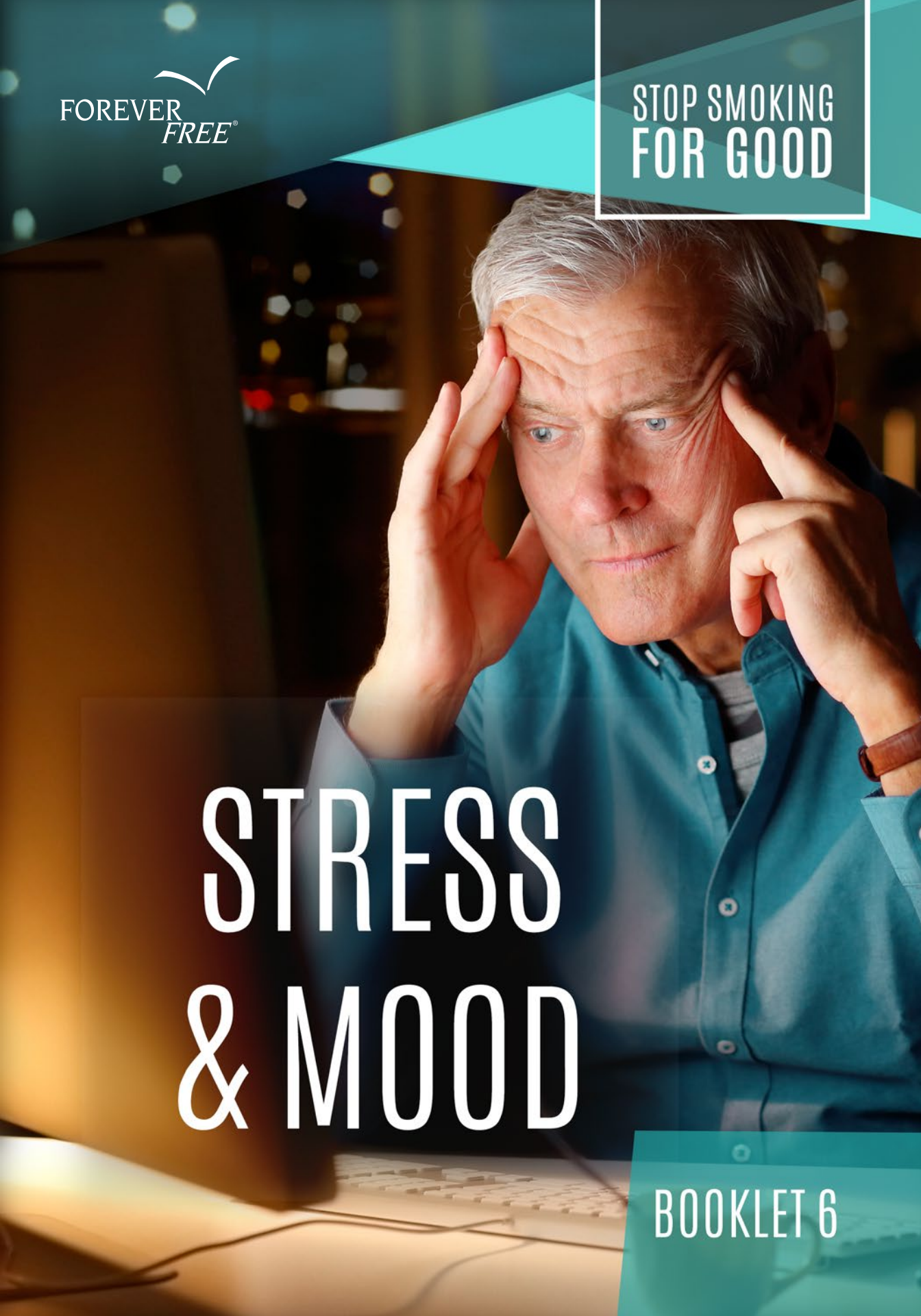


FOREVER  
*FREE*<sup>®</sup>

STOP SMOKING  
FOR GOOD



# STRESS & MOOD

BOOKLET 6

**This is Booklet 6 in the *Stop Smoking For Good* series. This booklet covers the link between stress, mood, and smoking. It focuses on why stress and unpleasant moods can make you want to smoke. It also lists some ways to deal with stress.**

## CONTENTS

What Causes Stress?	2
What Is Stress?	3
How Is Stress Related to Smoking?	4
So, Why Not Smoke When Stressed?	5
Better Ways to Deal with Stress and Negative Moods	7

# What Causes Stress?

Stress is what we have when life gives us challenges. We can be challenged in many ways. There can be life changes (like a new job or having a baby). Perhaps a problem that must be solved (like finding ways to pay bills). Perhaps we are pressured to do a task (like when the boss wants our report first thing in the morning). Or we have to make a hard choice (like deciding whether to have surgery). When we are challenged, we may have stress. These challenges are called stressors.

Stressors come in all shapes and forms. Major life events can be stressors. The list below shows some major life events that most people would find stressful.



## Some Major Life Events (Stressors)

Death of a family member  
Jail sentence  
Partner is not faithful  
Bankruptcy  
Fired from job  
Miscarriage or stillbirth  
Divorce  
Unwanted pregnancy  
Serious illness  
Demotion  
Lawsuit

Poor grades  
Fights with boss  
Move to a new place  
Menopause  
Retirement  
Child leaves home  
Birth of child  
Marriage  
Pregnancy  
Change in job  
Remodeling

**Did you notice that some “good” events, such as marriage, can also be stressful? That’s because people need to adjust to something new.**

**“Even happy events can be stressful.”**

Major life events are not the only things that cause stress. Life is full of daily hassles that cause stress. Hassles are those things that happen on a regular basis. The list below shows a few examples. In the blank lines at the end, add some “**hassles**” in your life.

### Some Daily Hassles (Stressors)

Minor money problems  
Car trouble  
Rude people  
Fights with partner  
Traffic jams  
Bad weather

Home repairs  
Arranging childcare  
Housework  
Loud children  
Dead or lost cell phone

#### Add your own daily hassles:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**In the long run, these daily hassles account for more stress than the major life events.**

## What Is Stress?

You probably know the answer to this question. What do you feel like when you are under stress? You may feel overwhelmed. You may feel tense. Perhaps your heart starts beating faster and you sweat more. You may get an upset stomach or a headache. As you worry about the stressor, you may start to feel anxious or depressed. As the stressor continues, you may want to find some way of getting away from it. Smokers may begin to have an urge for a cigarette.

People differ in how they react to stress. Some people have more stress in their lives than others. Some people also react more to stress than others. And some people are better than others at coping with stress once it starts.

People who have trouble dealing with stress often have strong emotional reactions to stress. Their moods change easily after a stressful event. These moods can include sadness and anxiety. In some people, their moods are so serious that they become depressed. (Depression and anxiety are not always caused by stressful events, but stress can cause or worsen these problems.)

## How Is Stress Related to Smoking?

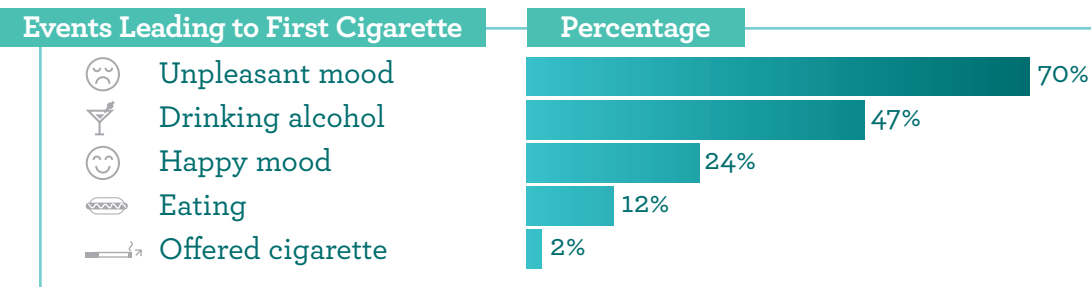
People who have a lot of stress tend to have a harder time quitting smoking. This is also true for people who are prone to negative moods, such as sadness and anxiety. We also know that when ex-smokers start smoking again, many times the first cigarette is because of stress or moods. People who are depressed are twice as likely as others to be smokers. They also have a harder time quitting and staying quit.

Why is this? Think about being a smoker. When you have stress or frustration, what do you do? When you are feeling down or bored, what do you do? When you are nervous, what do you do? Chances are that you smoke. You have learned to use cigarettes as a way to deal with stress and negative moods.



### What Leads Up to A Cigarette?

What leads ex-smokers to have their first cigarette? We followed a group of ex-smokers and then asked them if and when they had a cigarette after they quit. Here is what they told us.



You can see that the most common event leading to smoking was being in a negative mood, such as feeling sad, tense, angry, or bored.

### Why do smokers deal with stress by smoking?

The answer to this question is not really known. However, we have some good ideas. Nicotine causes the brain to release chemicals, called neurotransmitters. Some of these natural chemicals such as dopamine, beta-endorphin and norepinephrine, can cause a person to feel better, but only for a short time. They can improve your mood for a while. So, smoking can serve as a quick “pick-me-up.” Indeed, nicotine is a stimulant, which is why a smoker’s pulse gets faster after a cigarette.

There are other reasons besides the effects of nicotine. Smokers often use the act of lighting and smoking a cigarette as a “time out” from thinking about or dealing with stress. Like any activity, smoking can distract a person from his or her troubles. Because smoking is often a social activity, some people find that lighting a cigarette brings to mind feelings of group support. This can comfort people in times of stress. Lastly, an addicted smoker will feel better after smoking because it relieves nicotine withdrawal symptoms.



## Smoking Actually Causes Stress

You may feel like your cigarette really helps you when you feel stressed. But, have you ever thought that smoking may actually cause stress? Think about the last time you were out somewhere and were not able to smoke when you had the urge. How did you feel? Probably not so great. Stress from nicotine withdrawal was kicking in. Many times, smokers think they need a cigarette to deal with stress. Actually, it’s just the body craving nicotine. Time and energy spent getting cigarettes when you run out also causes stress.

## So, Why Not Smoke When Stressed?

**There are many problems with using cigarettes as a way to cope with stress or other unpleasant feelings:**

- The relief only lasts a short time. Soon your stress will return and you will need to smoke another cigarette.
- Smoking does not solve your problem; it only hides it. The cause of your problem remains.
- Smoking is not a healthy way to deal with stress. The stress probably will not kill you, but the smoking may. (See Booklet 5: *Your Health*.)
- Smoking actually causes more stress than it relieves. Studies show that stress levels go down after quitting.
- After you quit smoking, you may have trouble dealing with stress and bad moods. If smoking was your main way of coping with stress, you will need to find new, better ways after you quit.

# Better Ways to Deal With Stress and Negative Moods

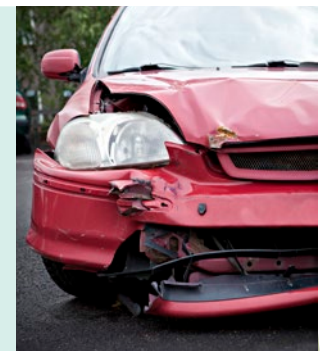
Most people, of course, are able to deal with stress and negative moods without smoking or using other drugs or alcohol. How do they do it?

## 1 Deal with the Problem

One good way to cope with life's challenges is to face your problem directly. Look at the source of the problem. Think about ways to solve it and then act.

All of these can take your mind off of a stressful situation. They also can improve your mood.

*Jo had quit smoking 6 months earlier. Today, on the way to work, her car ran into a guard rail. Her car's front end had a lot of damage. Jo became stressed and anxious. She began worrying about not having money to fix the car and she would then have no way to get to work. She thought about having a cigarette, which was how she used to calm herself down. Instead, she decided to try to find solutions to her problems. First, she found a co-worker who agreed to give her a ride to work while her car was being fixed. One problem solved. Next, she called her insurance company. They would cover the repairs, except for a \$500 deductible, money she didn't have. She decided to borrow some money from her parents, to hold a garage sale that she had been planning for years, and to delay buying some new clothes. This was not an ideal answer, but it did allow her to repair her car and get back to work. She solved the problem without smoking!*



## 2 Do Other Activities

There are many other things besides smoking that can reduce stress. Reading, exercise, relaxation, deep breathing, prayer, meditation, and taking a walk.

All of these can take your mind off of a stressful situation. They also can improve your mood.

***Matt** was one of those smokers who lit a cigarette when his mood was not good. When something the least bit stressful happened, he would reach for a cigarette right away. After he quit, he had urges to smoke when he felt stressed or down. He quickly found out that he needed to come up with something that helped him feel the way he did when he smoked. He came up with the idea of doing deep breathing exercises. The deep breathing was like smoking, and it also let his body relax. When he felt tense, this is what he would do. He would close his mouth, relax his shoulders, and inhale deeply while counting to eight. Then he would hold his breath for four seconds. Next he would exhale slowly while counting to eight. Matt found that if he repeated these steps five times he would feel relief of stress and tension. It worked at least as well as smoking used to.*



## 3 Talk to Someone

One of the best ways to deal with stress is to talk to someone. Most of us do this by talking to friends, family, or co-workers.

*Whenever **Janice** felt stressed, she would call her best friend, Alice, and they would talk about her problem. Sometimes they were able to come up with good answers to the problem. But, even when they could not solve it, just talking about it helped Janice.*



Other people like to join a support group. People in a support group often have the same types of problems, so they can help each other.

When **Bob** was diagnosed with skin cancer, he felt overwhelmed. This was the worst thing that ever happened to him. He did not know if he was going to live or die. He did not know what the treatment was going to do to him. He was anxious, depressed, and afraid. His doctor suggested that he join a support group for cancer patients. At first, he did not like the idea. He was never the kind of person who liked to talk about his problems and fears. But he decided to give it a chance. During those first group meetings, Bob listened quietly. He learned a lot about cancer and cancer treatment just by listening. Later, he became more open and active. He found that he was not alone with his fears. He also found that he felt better after talking. Bob then began to help new members of the group.



Some people have very strong reactions to stress. They suffer from mood problems that get in the way of their lives. These people may benefit from seeing a health professional, such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker.

**Alex** seemed to be living under a cloud. He could not remember the last time he was happy. The best he ever felt was neutral. Any kind of problem or stress seemed to make him feel sad or depressed. He had felt this way for quite some time, but it may have gotten worse since he quit smoking last year. He was having a hard time getting out of bed in the morning. There seemed to be nothing that he liked any more. At times he had thoughts about killing himself, but he did not really have the energy for that either. (Besides, he did not think that suicide would be fair to his family.) On the advice of his doctor he entered therapy with a psychologist. This has helped him to look at the causes of his depression. Together, they are working on changing the way that Alex looks at the world, which should help relieve his depression.



Besides therapy, a doctor may prescribe medication as part of treatment for depression, anxiety, or other psychological problems.

#### 4 Accept Temporary Stress

A certain amount of stress is a part of life. Success at quitting smoking may mean simply getting used to what stress feels like without smoking. You will learn that the feeling of stress will pass even if you do not have a cigarette. Because smokers often have a cigarette when they feel stressed, they may forget that these feelings do get better on their own.



## Look at Your Life

The four methods listed above should help you deal with stress in your life.

But another way is to change your lifestyle to reduce the number of stressors. Is your life more stressful than it has to be? Clearly, there are some stressors that people may have little control over. But some stressors are from choices that we make about our lives. Ask yourself if there are ways to reduce the stress in your life. Ask yourself if there are ways to get more good things from life. Here is just one example:

*After Steve quit smoking, he figured that it was a good time to take a look at the rest of his life. He was so proud of himself for quitting that he now felt that he could make other decisions that might improve his life. The main conclusion that he reached was that he was not spending as much time with his family as he would like. He felt that he was missing much of his son's childhood*



*years. Steve's job required long, stressful hours and he had become a "workaholic." During the little time he spent at home, he was too tired to have fun with his family. But he decided to change. He looked for other jobs that would need less hours. After a couple of months, he found a job that took only 40 hours per week. Quitting the stressful job now gave him time to be with his family. Steve found that he was much happier than before and a lot less stressed.*

Of course, there are a lot of other ways to reduce stress in your life. Watch for the next *Stop Smoking For Good Booklet 7: "Lifestyle Balance,"* which will discuss "positive habits."



## The Most Important Messages

You should be proud for deciding to quit smoking and taking a step toward a better and longer life. Once again, congratulations!

We ask that you save this copy of *Forever Free*® and re-read it many times during the first year or two after quitting. People often forget the important points. To help you remember, here are some important *Forever Free*® messages.

1

Remember, smokers and nonsmokers all have stress.

2

Smoking won't fix the cause of your stress.

3

Smoking actually causes MORE stress.

4

Find effective ways to deal with the problem.

5

Practice relaxation like deep breathing, prayer, or exercise.

6

Seek support from others—not cigarettes—when you are under stress.

7

Change your lifestyle to reduce stress.



# STOP SMOKING FOR GOOD



Development of this booklet was supported by grants from the:

- American Cancer Society (PBR-94)
- National Institutes of Health (R01CA80706; R01CA134347; R01DA037961)

Produced by the Tobacco Research and Intervention Program at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute.

Director: Thomas H. Brandon, Ph.D.  
1(877) 954-2548 | [projectEASE@moffitt.org](mailto:projectEASE@moffitt.org)

©H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute

RL – 6

The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.