



IF YOU VAPE

A GUIDE TO
QUITTING SMOKING

BOOKLET 6



SMOKING, STRESS & MOOD

*This is Booklet 6 in the **If You Vape** 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.*

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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 on the next page shows some major life events that most people would find stressful.

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.

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

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
- Internet is down
- Bad weather
- Home repairs
- Arranging childcare
- Housework
- Loud children
- Dead or lost cell phone

Add your own daily hassles:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



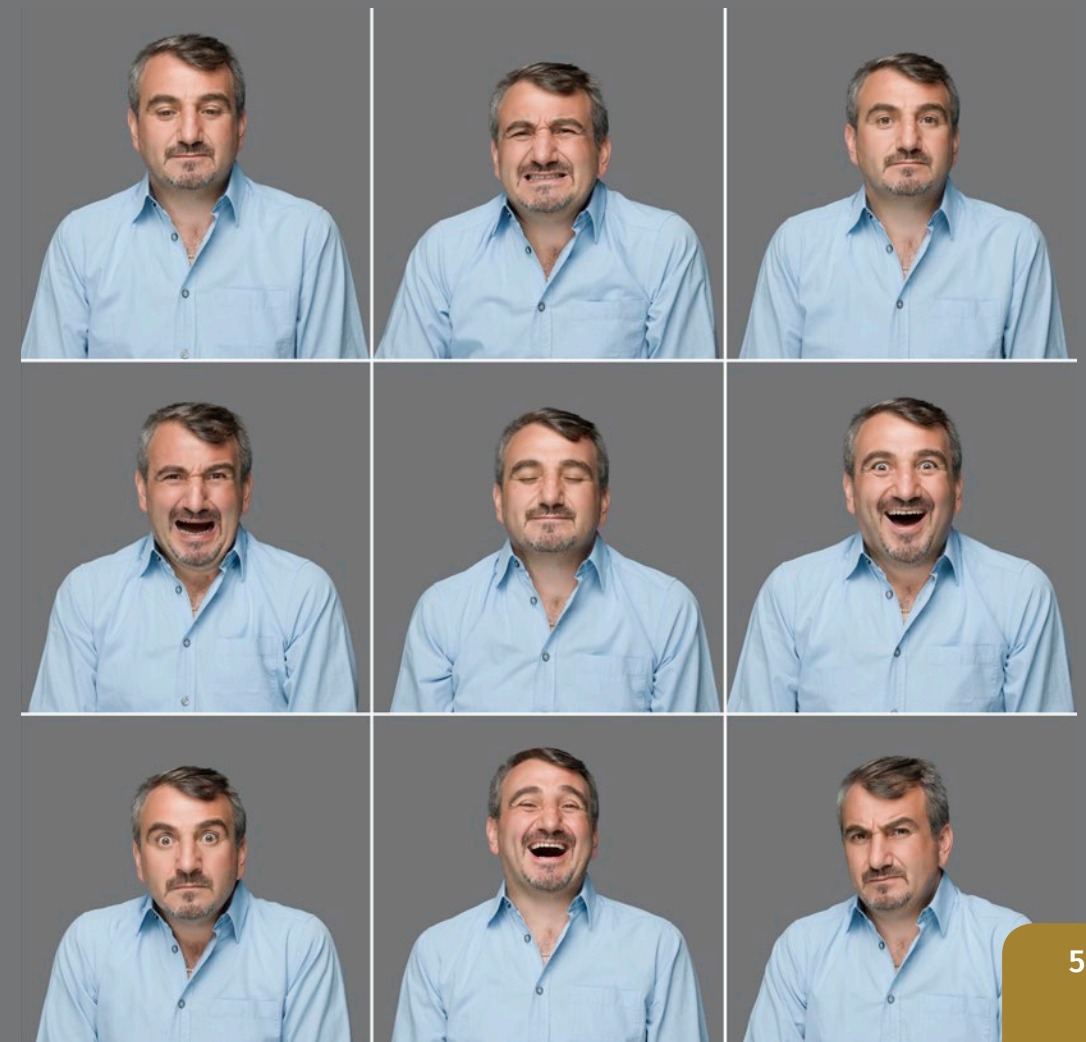
*In the long run,
these daily hassles
account for more
stress than the
major life events.*

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 (see box below). 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. This can also be true for e-cigarettes. Many vapers tell us that they use their e-cigarette when feeling stressed.



What Leads Up to A Cigarette After Quitting?

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.

| Event Leading to First Cigarette | Percent |
|----------------------------------|---------|
| Unpleasant mood..... | 70% |
| Drinking alcohol..... | 47% |
| Happy mood | 24% |
| Eating..... | 12% |
| Offered cigarette | 2% |


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 feelings of group support. This can comfort people in times of stress. People turn to vaping for these same reasons. This may explain why some people vape as a way to cope with stress.

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. This is also true for e-cigarettes. Time, money, 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 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.



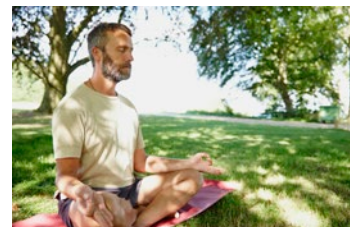
Jo had quit smoking 6 months ago. Today, on the way to work, her car ran into a guard rail. Her car's front end had a lot of damage. Jo became stressed and anxious. She began worrying about not having money to fix the car and not having a way to get to work. She thought about having a cigarette, which 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, hold a garage sale that she had been planning for years, and 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, 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 Use E-cigarettes or Nicotine Replacement Products



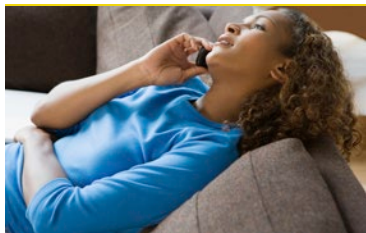
Nicotine is a fast-acting pick-me-up. After quitting, nicotine withdrawal feels like stress. Many ex-smokers say that nicotine replacement products like the patch or gum helped with stress from nicotine withdrawal. Vapers have told us that the act of vaping is more similar to smoking and gives them something to do when they feel stressed. For this reason, many vapers have said that an e-cigarette is a good substitute for smoking when feeling stressed.



Luis was up late working on a big project due in the next few days. Everything was taking longer than he had anticipated. The project was not coming together well, colleagues were slow to provide feedback, and now his computer was freezing up. Luis really wanted a cigarette break to relieve the fatigue and stress. But he had already cut down and was trying to quit. Instead, he reached for his e-cigarette. Luis was surprised to find that his stress was relieved almost as well as when he smoked. Although vaping didn't fix his computer, he didn't have to add the guilt of smoking to his problems that night.

4 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. But 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.



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

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

5 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.

6 Look at Your Life

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 children'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.

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*Watch for the next **If You Vape** booklet, 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 *If You Vape* 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 *If You Vape* 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, meditation, prayer, or exercise.
- 6 Use e-cigarettes or nicotine replacement products to reduce the stress from withdrawal. Many vapers tell us that they use e-cigarettes when stressed.
- 7 Seek support from others—not cigarettes-- when you are under stress.
- 8 Change your lifestyle to reduce stress.

IF YOU VAPE



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