

Craving Triggers

Nicotine is a highly addictive drug and, in those who are addicted (i.e. smokers), stopping can result in powerful physiological withdrawal symptoms.

People also smoke for psychological reasons, however. These can be explained using the work of Russian psychologist, Ivan Pavlov.

Pavlov noticed that dogs salivate when they are presented with food. He then started to ring a bell shortly before giving the food. At first the dogs did not salivate until the food was presented a few moments later. However, before long, the dogs began to associate the bell with the food and salivated on hearing the bell (i.e. before the food had been presented).

How does this relate to smoking?

Many smokers smoke regularly, in particular when in certain places or engaged in certain activities. Smokers, therefore, come to associate these situations or activities with smoking (see examples below). As a consequence, they will experience cravings when in a particular situation in which they are accustomed to smoking. These cravings will occur whether or not nicotine levels are low. These situations are called 'craving triggers'.

Examples of 'craving triggers' are:

Matches, lighters, ashtrays

Drinks (coffee, tea, alcohol)

Stressful situations and crises

Arguments (and making up afterwards)

The sight, sound or smell of others smoking

Smoking on TV

Celebrations

Telephone calls

Work breaks

Concentrating

Driving

Boredom

Anger

Pubs

After sex

Certain people e.g. those with whom an
ex-smoker used to smoke

It can be useful to encourage clients to consider their own 'craving triggers' during their preparation stage (see previous page.) Is there a way in which they can minimise these 'craving triggers' by changing regular patterns of behaviour and starting to break associations?

Encourage clients to think of their own ideas. Below are some suggestions in case they cannot think of any:

Getting up / breakfast: If tea and coffee are strongly associated with cigarettes, the quitter may decide to drink something else (e.g. orange juice) for a time instead.

Going out / going to work: Your client may want to make the car a no smoking zone and travel in no smoking sections of public transport. They may wish to use a dummy cigarette while driving.

After housework / other tasks: It may be useful to find another reward to nibble on when finished jobs around the house e.g. fruit, sugar free gum. Most people are also keen to keep busy and move onto the next job before the craving has a chance to set in!

Watching TV: Some people find it useful to sit in a different chair from normal. Is there a way for your client to keep his/her hands busy? They may enjoy knitting, crosswords or model making.

After meals: Your client could plan to get up as soon as s/he has finished eating. S/he may want to go out for a brisk walk or immediately do the washing up.

In the pub: Many people plan to avoid the pub for the first few weeks until they feel stronger. They may also change what they drink, sit in a no smoking area and drink less over the evening to ensure that their resolve is not lowered.

If people have anticipated some of these craving triggers and planned ways of coping with them (or avoiding them for the first few weeks), they are more likely to resist temptation.