

SMOKING AND TOBACCO ADDICTION

There are several coping and defence mechanisms that people often use to overcome the problems or difficulties they encounter in their daily lives. Even though these mechanisms vary from person to person, most of these psychological and physiological responses to difficulties can be classified as 'stressors'. Using methods to combat stressors, we can either try to overcome the situation that causes the problem, or we can choose to avoid the situation by ignoring it. Besides all these strategies, people often prefer to smoke cigarettes and tobacco, without even realizing it, in order to keep the stressing situation under control or to experience instant relief.

Smoking is not a coping strategy. It is a learned or copied behaviour based on individual observations or social influences. People need to be aware of their addictions and they need to observe how they cope with the problems. This is of critical importance in terms of raising awareness.

Smoking is considered an addiction if the user

- Has been smoking consistently for a certain period of time,
- Feels restless when s/he does not/cannot smoke,
- Does not participate in events or activities where smoking & tobacco is not allowed,
- Prefers smoking cigarettes in order to tolerate feelings such as happiness, sadness, excitement, and anxiety,
- Feels like s/he has to smoke after a meal or while drinking coffee,
- Continues to smoke even though s/he is having health problems, or s/he is aware that it is a harmful habit, therefore s/he must quit it.

Every smoker has the potential to become addicted. The important factors affecting cigarette and tobacco addiction are as follows:

Age: The earlier the age of starting to smoke, the greater the risk of becoming addicted.

Parents and Social Environment: Having family members who smoke or high smoking and tobacco-use rates in social milieus of adolescents play an important role in determining addictive behaviour.

Mental Health: Research shows that individuals with high psychopathological symptoms are more likely to progress to heavier smoking and dependence. Especially, individuals suffering from depression, anxiety and panic disorders, and disorders related to traumatic experiences have a higher risk of becoming addicted.

Alcohol Use: Since individuals who consume alcohol have a higher tendency to use tobacco products, they too have a higher risk of becoming addicted.

There are numerous diseases associated with smoking and tobacco use. There are more than 60 chemicals in cigarette smoke increasing the risk of people getting one or more of these diseases, which are:

Lung cancer and lung diseases. Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer deaths, and it also causes lung diseases such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis. If you have asthma, smoking is quite risky because of the damage it does to the lungs.

Other cancer types. Smoking increases the risk of many other types of cancer, including cancer of the mouth, throat (pharynx), oesophagus, larynx, bladder, pancreas, kidney, cervical cancer, and some types of leukaemia.

Heart and circulatory system problems. Smoking increases your risk of dying from heart and blood vessel (cardiovascular) diseases, including heart attack and stroke. If you have any heart or blood vessel disease, such as heart failure, smoking will worsen your condition.

Diabetes. Smoking can lead to type 2 diabetes. Chemicals in cigarettes harm and change cells in your body so they stop responding to insulin, which increases blood sugar levels. Smoking can also accelerate the progression of complications such as kidney disease and eye problems if you have diabetes.

Eye problems. Smoking can increase your risk of suffering serious eye problems, such as cataracts and vision loss from macular degeneration.

Female infertility and erectile dysfunction. Studies have shown that smoking can cause infertility in women and sexual dysfunction in men.

Complications during pregnancy. Mothers who smoke while pregnant are at higher risk of giving birth prematurely. Babies born to mothers who smoke during pregnancy tend to have low birth weight.

Cold, flu and other illnesses. Smoking is a substantial risk factor for many acute respiratory infections such as cold, flu, and bronchitis.

Addiction not only has harmful physiological effects on the individual, but it is also an indicator of a psychological pattern. Therefore, applying psychotherapy along with medical treatments in the process of changing addictive behaviour is important in terms of both identifying learned behaviour patterns and helping the patient develop new behavioural rituals.

Individuals who consistently consume tobacco products experience dizziness, depressive mood, feelings of impatience and anxiety, anger, difficulty concentrating, headache, increased appetite, weight gain, and other similar symptoms when they do not smoke. The leading cause of tobacco addiction is the chemicals in it, especially, the nicotine. When nicotine is absorbed into the bloodstream, it travels to the heart, and then pumped throughout the entire body, including the brain, where it stimulates the release of the chemical dopamine, a neurotransmitter involved in triggering positive feelings. The person experiencing these positive feelings tends to repeat the behaviour in order to experience it again and again. Since nicotine is a highly addictive chemical, the addiction is both physical and mental, meaning habitual smokers crave nicotine and consciously desire its effects. Nicotine replacement therapy is a common treatment intended to help people stop smoking by using products that supply low doses of nicotine such as nicotine gum, nicotine lozenges, nicotine patches and nicotine mouth sprays.

Smoking is not merely a physical addiction to nicotine, but it is also a social addiction. It is often observed that smoking is a behaviour that is imitated and repeated in order to be included in a group. When an individual wants to be socially included in a group, s/he may tend to repeat the behaviours exhibited by the members of that group, and in a group setting, smoking is among the most common behavioural rituals. When treating physiological symptoms of smoking addiction, it is also important to perform psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapies, and neuro-linguistic programming to simultaneously treat the psychological symptoms in terms of creating a permanent solution.

Senior Psychologist H. Mert ÖZAYDIN