**Stress and Smoking: Understanding Stress to Support Success:**

What are your stressors?

Stress comes in all shapes and sizes, from major life events to daily hassles that add up over time. Dealing with many small stresses can weigh you down and wear you out as much one large stressor. Sometimes even happy events can be stressful. Ever felt like the holidays were a rough time? Kids can be a source of stress, and so can being pregnant, even when the parents are happy the baby is on the way.

Knowing your stressors is an important step in finding ways to deal with them. Speak with members of your health care team in order to better understand how stress may impact your choice in living tobacco free. Never forget that the specialists at 1-800-QUIT-NOW are available to help connect you to local resources to empower your quit attempt.

The stress-smoking link:

Stress is a reason why many people smoke. When you have a bad day, it can seem like your cigarettes are your only friend. Cigarettes can help you calm down, relax, and feel like you are pampering yourself. Sound familiar?

But you know that smoking is also hurting you and the people in your life. Stress is part of life, so a key part of quitting smoking for many people is finding ways to handle stress and take care of themselves without smoking. So, it is worth spending some time thinking about and looking for ways to deal with the busy days that are so often a part of life.

Dealing with stress:

Here are some tips that many people have found helpful. Some of the ideas on this list may be perfect for you, others may not be your style. Some take practice, some work right away. Try them out. Come up with your own ideas. If something works for you, great! If not, no big deal. Simply try another one. You are the only person who knows what works best for you and what doesn’t. Keep looking for ways to make your quitting and your day easier.

*Adapted from smokefree.gov*
Strategize to help deal with stress:

1. **Take a break.** Even if it is just for a few minutes, find a way to step back from what is happening. This might mean doing something that is relaxing, actually getting away from it for a while or taking a "mini vacation" in your head by imagining you are somewhere else.

2. **Deep breathing.** Take a few slow, deep breaths. For an extra benefit, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. You will feel your body relax.

3. **Visualize.** Close your eyes and imagine you are in a place where you feel safe, comfortable, and relaxed. It can be a real place or one you make up. Picture it as clearly as you can, including imagining what you would feel, hear, and maybe even smell if you were in that relaxing place. Let yourself enjoy being there for a few minutes.

4. **Exercise.** When your body is active, it sends out natural chemicals that help your mood and reduce your stress. Walking is one of the easiest exercises for most people. Even a short walk every day will help you to reduce your stress and improve your health. And it is free!

5. **Focus on relaxing your body.** Our bodies hold on to stress and tension. Stop for a minute and pay attention to your body and you will find places that are tight and tense. Finding ways to reduce that tension will also help your mental stress. Easy ways to do this include things like stretching, exercise, or getting a massage. Even a few minutes of rubbing your shoulders, neck, and head can release lots of tension.

6. **Talk to someone for support.** Sharing your thoughts and being involved with other people is a great way to help reduce stress.

7. **Focus on the here and now.** Many of us spend a lot of energy worrying about things that may go wrong in the future and how bad they might be. Instead, try focusing just on what is happening now, not on what you might have to deal with in the future.

8. **Accept that stress happens.** Life is full of twists and turns. You will always have some stress in your life. It is often helpful to accept that there will be good days and bad days and not worry too much about the bad days. Tomorrow will be a new day.

9. **Take care of yourself.** Especially right after quitting smoking, you should make extra efforts to take care of yourself. This includes basic things like:
   - Eating a balanced diet
   - Drinking lots of water
   - Getting enough sleep

10. **Cut out caffeine.** Caffeine helps keep you awake when you are tired, but it also can make you feel tense, jittery, worried, and stressed. So if you are feeling stressed, drinking caffeinated coffee, tea, or soda is like adding stress on top of your stress! This is especially true when you are quitting smoking. Cutting back or even eliminating caffeine can help reduce your feelings of stress.

11. **Face the problem.** A lot of stress is caused by things that are happening in your life. Stop and think about what makes you stressed. Is there something you could be doing to fix the problem? It can be helpful to talk with others about what is happening and see if there are ways to make it better.

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