

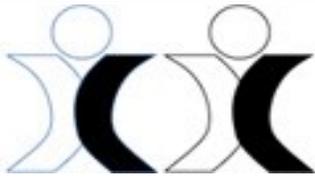


**Consumers Helping
Others Improve
Their Condition by
Ending Smoking**

CHOICES NEWSLETTER - June 2023

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Mindfulness for Cravings and Withdrawal

by Azeem Sitabkhan

I have worked for CHOICES for over 5 years now. I also started a daily mindfulness meditation practice of about 1 hour a day around the same time. I believe that the practice of mindfulness can greatly benefit those who are quitting smoking to help deal with their withdrawal and cravings. I will give a brief overview of my take on how and why, given my 5 years of meditation experience.

The two wings of the ‘bird’ of mindfulness are ‘awareness’ and ‘radical acceptance’ towards your thoughts and feelings, and indeed anything else happening in your world. ‘Awareness’ is knowing when something is happening and observing it. ‘Radical acceptance’ is a balance and suggests not interfering with whatever is happening. These 2 factors, when cultivated in equal quantities, will allow your mindfulness ‘bird’ to soar. It’s important to note that if you just have ‘awareness’ without ‘acceptance’, you might become overly sensitive and triggered. If you just have ‘acceptance’ without ‘awareness’, you will reach only a superficial level of balance in your mind. You must have both to truly develop in the practice.

Continued on page 4

Community Voice Award

by Trish Dooley Budsock

On February 23, 2023, the CHOICES Program was awarded with the “Community Voice Impact” Award, presented by the Social Innovations Journal. The team was nominated by one of our long-time collaborative partners, and CHOICES champion, Dana Lugassy, from the George Otowski Sr. Center for Mental Health Care, Perth Amboy. This award was voted on publicly and was a recognition of CHOICES’ efforts to promote the voices of the mental health community as a way of improving health



Continued on page 4

Vaping Versus Nicotine Replacement Therapies

By Cleo Zifovski



Many former smokers have made the move to vaping after learning that newer electronic cigarettes



may be safer than smoked cigarettes. Some people have never even heard of any alternatives to smoking. When compared to conventional nicotine replacement therapy, (such as gums and lozenges), the research on e-cigarettes' is mixed. Researchers note that in order to assess whether or not vapes are a safe alternative to cigarettes, additional study into their long-term health effects is required [1].

Review results published in the Cochrane Library in November 2022 found "high certainty of evidence that people can stop smoking traditional cigarettes for at least 6 months using e-cigarettes, or 'vapes.'" Thus, a professor in the Department of Internal Medicine at the Ohio State University College of Medicine who specializes in the treatment of lung cancer concludes, "In terms of the global research, it's pretty clear that vaping can help smokers quit" [1]. Conversely, one research study published in 2013 and another in 2020 both revealed that when participants used e-cigarettes in conjunction *continued on page 4*

Bupropion: The Smoking Inhibitor

By Terrance H

From my personal experience, I can recall being prescribed Bupropion about thirty years ago while I was attending college. The purpose of the medication was twofold: first, it was to relieve depression; second, it was for smoking cessation. At that time, I received a psychiatric diagnosis of bipolar disorder. I was a smoker back then. Unfortunately, because I was a consumer of tobacco, the medication seemed to inadvertently induce a side effect where it disturbed my concentration, and therefore I stopped taking it, and kept smoking.

I approached my professor and confided in him that I was afflicted with a mental illness. Lo and behold, as if lady luck was in my corner, he understood my plight and treated me with great compassion. It just so happened that his mother was impaired with the same illness. As a result, he and I developed a trustworthy relationship. He supported me throughout the entire semester. Circumstances were not perfect, but I managed to complete the course.



Despite the rigor of my schoolwork, I believe that the problems with stabilizing Bupropion would have been mitigated had I then quit smoking, but it wasn't the right time for me. The outcome of the course was a grade of "C." Considering all the complications I endured, my grade was worth all the effort. I look back on this task with a great deal of satisfaction. A relevant example of this medication being effective in quitting smoking was a friend of mine who had taken it. For this person, the medication was a complete success. This person had tried various NRTs and they did not work. Finally, the logical choice was to try Bupropion, and it worked.

Smoking Causes Dental Problems

By Deidre Stenard

I have always had a lot of cavities as a smoker, and I was smoking one pack a day in the beginning. I was getting an aver-



age of 3 cavities filled per dental visit for six years. I moved out to California in 1995, where I got cosmetic dentistry done on my top front teeth, totaling 6 teeth, and had 6 porcelain veneers put in. I got them put in because my teeth were badly damaged because of smoking. At the time I was smoking 2 packs of cigarettes a day. I was smoking more because my addiction to cigarettes had progressed and I needed to smoke more in order to get the same nicotine fix. My teeth were badly stained and there were cavities in some of my front teeth, giving my smile a dilapidated look, that I was embarrassed about. So, I got the porcelain veneers to the tune of \$6,000.

In 2006, I was starting to feel the consequences of smoking because I was smoking 3 packs a day and my lungs hurt, I was wheezing and I had a horrible cough. I quit by 2007 with the help of the Tobacco Dependence Program in New Brunswick. I tried to quit 8 times and on the 8th try I quit for good. However, there was damage I did to my teeth that I would have to deal with even after I quit. The damage had already been done and couldn't be reversed. Fast forward to 2020, I had one whole tooth crumble. When it crumbled I could see the tobacco stain all through the tooth, on the inside of the tooth. My dentist was able to put a crown on it. There were a few teeth that followed, where my dentist was able to put crowns on them. Then, in a period of a year or so, 2022-2023,

continued on page 4

Menthol Ban?

By Lisa Evans

I have been reporting on menthol cigarettes and the government's efforts to ban menthol for several years. I smoked menthol cigarettes for 41 years and I now understand fully how menthol affected my health and my ability to quit smoking. It was painful to learn how cigarette companies specifically targeted African Americans with this product. That is probably why African American men die at a high rate of lung cancer. I was thrilled to learn that the FDA was seeking to ban menthol in 2014. In 2018, a bill was introduced in New Jersey to ban the sale of menthol cigarettes. Now in 2023, menthol cigarettes are still available in every convenience store and gas station in New Jersey. With the exception of California and Massachusetts, you can purchase menthol cigarettes everywhere else in the United States. What happened to the menthol ban?

I think the answer is money. Menthol cigarettes are big business for the tobacco companies. In 2020, the CDC reported "sales of menthol-flavored cigarettes made up 37% of all cigarette sales in the U.S." Since the smoking population has also decreased from a high of 50% of adults in the 1940's to just under 12.5% in 2022, revenue from cigarette sales is down. R.J. Reynolds said in a statement that a ban would have little impact on overall cigarette consumption and lead to illegal cigarette sales. "We strongly believe there are more effective ways to deliver tobacco harm reduction than banning products," the company said.

Government officials who oppose the menthol ban cite the loss in tax revenues as their main concern. Community activists and clergy fear the development of an illegal market for menthol products.

None of the opponents seem to have any concern for the menthol smokers who are more addicted, inhale more deeply, *continued on page 5*

So what happens when you observe (are aware of) your thoughts and your feelings with radical acceptance? Let's take a really bad craving or withdrawal symptom as an example. You will notice that if you observe the feeling of craving in your body, it is not a static sensation, it is actually in constant flux, constantly changing. There is a flow occurring continuously in your personal, subjective experience and indeed in everything outside as well. But we normally can't see this because the change is happening too quickly and sometimes too subtly. But as we develop in mindfulness, we will see this change much more clearly. And as we do, we learn to let the feeling flow and shift. That craving is a creature in its own right and will do its dance in your body and mind and then fade away. The more you see this shifting, impermanent, flowing nature of the craving, the less and less this thought/feeling of craving will have power over you and the more it will diminish in intensity. This is, in essence, the great magic of mindfulness. It does take time and effort to master this skill however.

If you do practice and develop the two qualities of 'awareness' and 'acceptance' with an 'understanding of change', the power of mindfulness will help you navigate any difficult emotion and, in time, can even fundamentally transform the very core of your being.

Teeth *continued from page 3*

I lost 7 teeth, and my dentist told me that there wasn't enough tooth remaining to put crowns on most of them; he couldn't save the teeth. I would have to have the teeth pulled and he would have to make a "partial." The "partial" is a mouthpiece that would take the place of the lost teeth, to the tune of \$2,767, not counting the cost of having the teeth pulled by an oral surgeon. If I could go back in time, I would NEVER smoke heavily. I would quit first to save my teeth.

Award *continued from page 1*



equity for historically underserved populations. The team was extremely gratified by this award and it has inspired them to continue the work they are doing in the field with a refreshed sense of purpose. The awards ceremony was virtual, and can be viewed here: <https://www.newjerseyinnovationawards.com/> Many of our readers and supporters may have voted for us, and for that we are extremely grateful! With in-person and virtual options available, please reach out to us to schedule a presentation soon!

Vaping *continued from page 2*

with patches, they were somewhat more likely to quit smoking than when they used patches alone [1]. However, some scientists are still unsure of vaping's long-term repercussions. Only recently have we started to get data on the health impacts of vapes, and thus yet, it has mostly come from studies of animals or cells. Since vaping devices were widely available in the United States only since the 2000s, measuring the health implications among users would require decades of research.

Rushton, K. (2023, April 27). Turning to vaping to stop smoking not a simple solution.



Creatively Inclined

CHOICES is proud of our peers who are creatively inclined in the arts, poetry, and writing. Are you an artist, poet, or writer and want to see your work in print? We would love to share your artwork, poem, or story! Please contact us via email at dooleypc@rutgers.edu.



In addition to sharing her story about how she quit smoking, CHOICES advocate, Deidre Stenard, shares her art work as well. Her paintings are sunny, bright, and joyous. Thank you Deidre!

L.O.L! L.O.L! L.O.L!

See answers below

by Terrance H

1. What do you give a deer with an upset stomach?

2. Why didn't Noah fish very often?

3. What do you call cheese that does not belong to you?

Menthol *continued from page 3*

and have greater health disparities than non-menthol smokers. All smoking has poor health outcomes for smokers, but an FDA study in 2013 found menthol cigarettes pose a public health risk above that seen with non-menthol cigarettes.

As of this writing there is still pending legislation out there and some states have moved closer to banning menthol. New Jersey has renewed its efforts to ban menthol again. The new bill, introduced in 2022, states it's intent as it "prohibits sale of menthol cigarettes and sale or distribution of flavored electronic smoking devices and related products". The tobacco companies are very concerned about recently elected Governor Kathy Hochul in New York who is leaning towards a large excise tax on cigarettes and a menthol ban.

I am living with the consequences of my 41 years of smoking and am grateful that so far, I am relatively healthy. I know now that my difficulty quitting was linked to the menthol cigarettes I coveted. I know that I was targeted as an African American to purchase these specific products. I know that you have the opportunity for a better health outcome. You may want to consider making changes to your smoking, especially if you smoke menthol cigarettes.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/23/nyregion/menthol-ban-black-smokers.html>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/healthmain/fda-menthol-cigarettes-bigger-public-health-risk-regular-cigs-6c10713833>

L.O.L! Answers

All jokes are either original by author or found in A Prairie Home Companion Pretty Good Joke Book 6th Edition

1. Elkasetzer.
2. He only had 2 worms.
3. Nacho cheese.



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The CHOICES team will come to you! The **CHOICES** team of peer advocates will visit your group or program in New Jersey and provide mental health consumers with education about the consequences of smoking and tobacco products along with information regarding treatment resources available to make quitting easier. Email us dooleypc@rutgers.edu to set up date.



CHOICES is a partnership between Rutgers-RWJMS Division of Addiction Psychiatry, the Mental Health Association of New Jersey (MHANJ) and the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services and funded by the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services .