

Ashes to ashes



In lung cancer awareness month, Becky Warren-Smith tells what happened when she met a hypnotist who claimed a one-hour session was all she needed to quit her 25-a-day smoking habit

Once upon a time, it was cool to smoke. Gangsters, sultry sirens, hard-nosed detectives and, of course, lesser mortals were always depicted in Hollywood or even Ealing comedies, puffing on a cigarette with wisps of smoke coiling seductively out of their lips. Nicotine-throaty voices were sexy and in those films no one ever had a smoker's cough, or wheezed as they tore up a flight of stairs, or died of lung cancer.

I thought it was cool to smoke too. Which is why I started puffing away at 13 – well, all the other kids did it and you were part of the crowd as you huddled together in the girls' loos at school, sharing a ciggie between the five of you. Yes, smoking was a really sociable thing.

For the next thirty odd years, I carried on smoking. Escalating deaths from lung cancer, annual price hikes from Her Majesty's Government, an ever-increasing number of areas where smoking was taboo made no difference. I was hooked.

Then after a bout of a particularly nasty and tiresome hacking cough, I read about QUITMasters who claim that a one-off session of hypnosis can work for even a diehard old smoker like me. Curious, I decided to book an appointment. My health mattered to me but I have to admit the immediate spur was when a colleague innocently asked me how much money I spent on cigarettes. Hmmm, almost £200 a month. A lot of money and a lot of incentive.

I smoked my last cigarette in a smart street in London's Knightsbridge, savouring every puff, before the appointment with my hypnotist, Diana, of QUITMasters UK. In just one hour, I'd be joining the fragrant ranks of the non-smoker.

How hypnosis works

Diana told me that hypnosis doesn't rely on gimmicks or substitutes – you have to want to quit for it to work – and that it's

successful for 95 per cent of their clients. She went on to explain that our mind works on two levels – the conscious and the unconscious. We make decisions, think and act with our conscious mind, while the unconscious mind controls our habits, such as smoking. After a brief chat about why I wished to quit (most people, it turns out, want to give up because it's burning a hole in their bank balance rather than the fear of it burning holes in their lungs) and the psychological reasons why I smoked (an emotional crutch that I believed helped me through times of stress), Diana directed me

over to a leather couch and dimmed the lights.

Diana told me to close my eyes and imagine that I was drifting in to my subconscious. I then

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had to count slowly backwards from 100 (I made it to 85) during which time she would assess when I'd attained the right level. I was then asked to think of a time when I felt content and in control (but not tell her this) and keep it in mind while she repeated in a rather stern tone, "I am now a non-smoker/I will never smoke another cigarette in my life" which I had to repeat over and over again while recalling that nice, contented episode from my past.

I was taken down an imaginary road lined on one side with leafless trees, bare rocks, sparse grass (that's the route back to smoking) while the other side is a mass of gorgeous flowers, sweet smells, lush grass (the path of the non-smoker). Diana told me that the colour red would now take on great significance to me as, like a traffic light, it would represent my decision to stop smoking. She then counted to five and told me to open my eyes.

Well, that was back in February and I haven't touched a cigarette since – not bad for someone who had a 25-a-day habit. I didn't experience any real

cravings until after the second week I'd quit, but they soon passed and within a month many people were complimenting me on how my eyes and skin were glowing. But the bad news was I put on about half a stone (no, I didn't resort to eating more) and I had an appalling cough for about a week – a result of all those noxious ciggie ingredients coming to the fore. I'm glad to say that I haven't become one of those sanctimonious ex-smokers who go round urging everyone to give up.

I allow a heavy-smoking friend to puff away to his heart's content in my house – I simply burn lots of lovely scented candles when he visits. Well, I can afford them with all that money I've saved! **W&H**

Want to give up?

Call QUITMasters on 0800-298 5155; a one-hour session costs £295; there are free back-up sessions if you need them.

DON'T DIE OF LUNG CANCER

Lung cancer is the UK's biggest cancer killer in both men and women, with 94 people a day dying from the disease. It's the most common cancer in men and the third most common in women and a major problem is late diagnosis.

MacMillan Cancer Relief and the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation are campaigning to raise awareness, as early detection makes survival 40 times more likely. If you have any of the following symptoms for more than three weeks, especially if you smoke or used to smoke, see your GP:

- reoccurring chest infections even after taking a course of antibiotics
- a nagging cough that lasts for more than three weeks
- feeling out of breath more than before
- losing your voice, even though your throat feels fine
- any unexplained shoulder, chest or back pain

For more information, call the Macmillan CancerLine on 0808-808 2020 or the Roy Castle Helpline on 0800-358 7200.

