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HEALTH



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Tapping into an individual's motivation is the key to breaking the bonds of nicotine addiction

SMOKING: A NEW WAY OUT

USE YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS TO KICK THE HABIT, SAYS JEROME BURNE

THE FINANCIAL and health benefits of quitting smoking are so obvious it's not surprising that there is a huge range of aids all claiming to help. Among the more recent offerings in America is "smokeless tobacco" (ie, "chewing tobacco"), which comes in a sort of mini tea bag.

In the UK the nicotine patch still rules, although an intriguing recent study suggests a genetic basis to the different ways in which men and women respond: though most women report that patches are not that helpful, those for whom they work may benefit from a mutation in the gene that controls the feel-good neurochemical dopamine.

These and most other aids focus on helping you get over your nicotine cravings. But what if nicotine addiction isn't really the problem? That's the suggestion being made by Quit Masters. "If you give someone a nicotine patch, they still want to smoke," says Pam McAlpine, a Quit Masters trainer, adding that it's not nicotine addiction that needs tackling, but a wrong belief. "Once you change that, you change behaviour."

A more sensational claim by Quit Masters is that you will be smoke-free after a one-hour session — otherwise you get your money back (£295).

It's the sort of stuff that sets alarm bells ringing, but it seems that the approach works for some people at least.

Angela Bradley, a 40-year-old retail manager, says: "I've been smoking since I was

about 20. I've tried to give up loads of times.

"I stopped when I was pregnant but as soon as I'd given birth, I really wanted a fag. Then I was going to do it when I took up yoga but I found that my teacher was a chain smoker. Allen Carr's system, cold turkey, patches — I've tried them all. But this is really working."

Essentially, Quit Masters offers old-fashioned hypnosis — which research has shown has a success rate of 36 per cent — with a twist: a technique known as neuro-linguistic programming.

McAlpine admits that it is difficult to describe exactly how this makes the difference. "The aim of the subconscious is to protect you," she says. "People start smoking to make them feel better socially and it works. They feel cooler, more grown-up. So the subconscious believes that smoking is good. Under hypnosis you can let it know that it's not doing its protecting job; instead it's killing you. That's when you get a change."

The key appears to lie in tapping into each individual's motivation — in Bradley's case, the desire to run a marathon one day — and into their belief system, and giving them techniques to use afterwards. "Under hypnosis you get given a colour," Bradley says. "That's your colour and every time you see it, it reaffirms that you are a non-smoker."

More fun than chewing on a tea bag?
Quit Masters UK 0800 2985155