

Are you one of many who gave up smoking on New Year's Eve, suffered valiantly for several days and then, unable to continue under such stress, capitulated to a cigarette?

Oh, I remember it well, the rush of relief at the first inhalation and then the guilt, the breast-beating, the despair at failing yet again to kick the habit.

This is the third New Year I have seen in without a cigarette. Before that I had been a 40-plus-a-day smoker for 18 years, albeit with the occasional, increasingly short, hiatus. My best effort kept me off the weed for four months, during which time I ate and drank to excess and went to bed very early because life was more bearable when I was unconscious.

The next time, in the interests of health and to avoid putting on weight, I abstained from all alcohol and most food except fruit and vegetables, exercised excessively and, again, went to bed early. It took three months before utter misery drove me back to smoking. I have tried acupuncture, hypnosis, behaviour modification, nicotine chewing-gum and cold turkey. Always, instead of the longing lessening after the first few expectedly awful days, it curiously seemed to increase.

The only reason I am an ex-smoker now is that finally I found and took a common-sense course called Full Stop, taught by ex-smoker and counsellor Gillian Riley. When I stopped, I ate and drank no more and no less than I did as a smoker and did not put on any weight. I did not get irritable and it made no difference to me whether I was with smokers or non-smokers. I am not saying that stopping was easy, but to all intents and purposes my life went on as before and no one would have known I had quit.

This is the first thing that is different about the Full Stop technique, which has just become available as a self-help book. Conventional advice urges the hapless giver-up to avoid for a while the activities normally associated with a cigarette. I tried this one: I had herb tea instead of coffee; I rose to do the washing-up the minute a meal was over instead of sitting and having a cigarette; I didn't go to pubs or restaurants; I avoided good friends who were smokers. The result was an absolutely dreary time with no way to avoid many other events I also associated with a cigarette, such as getting up in the morning, answering the phone and working.

Of course, the big problem with the conventional advice – apart from its being impractical and reinforcing the idea that life without smoking isn't any fun – is that it doesn't offer anything to get you through the unexpected encounter, such as the smell of fresh smoke as the woman in front of you at the bus-stop lights up.

Nor does it offer any means of coping with the sight and smell of cigarettes once you do allow yourself back into circulation with smokers. The thinking, I suppose, is that once the

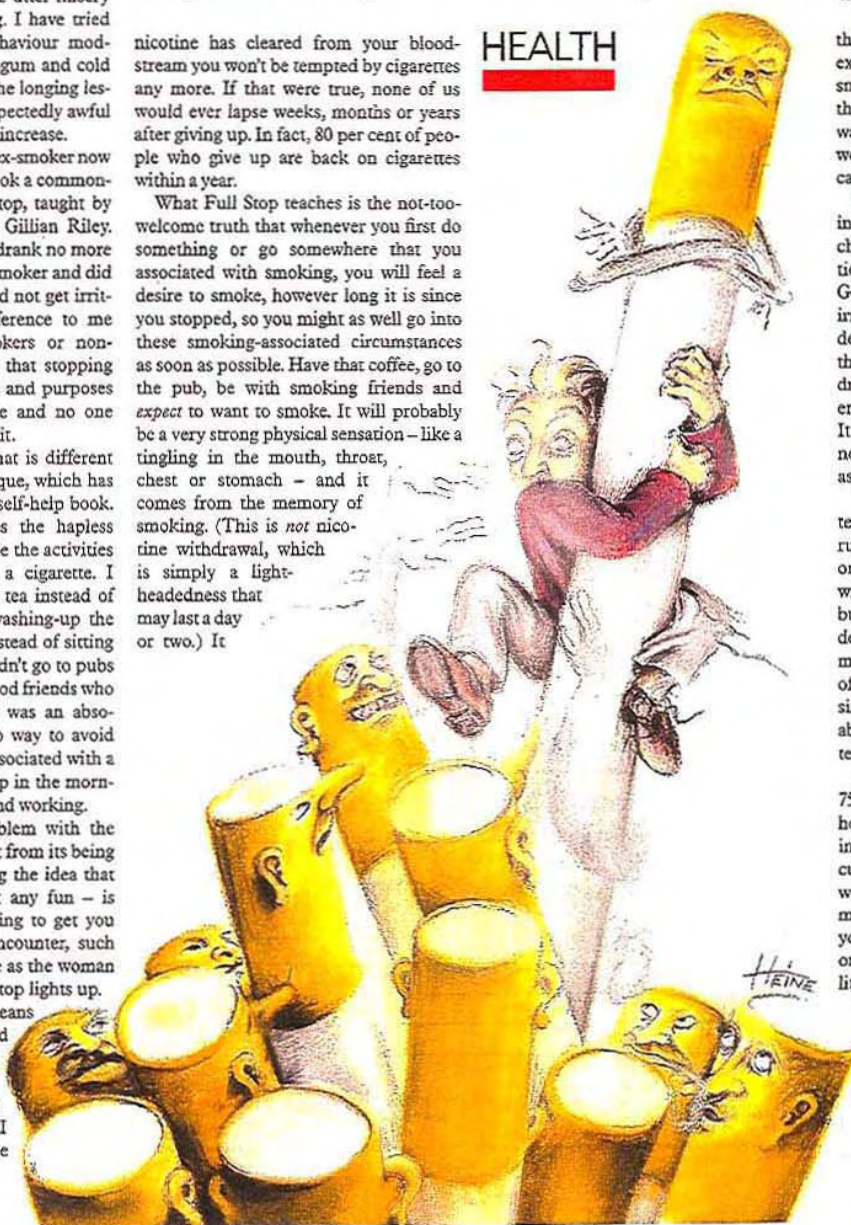
# HOW NOT TO QUIT QUITTING

*If your New Year's resolution to give up smoking for the rest of your life is already looking shaky, take heart. Denise Winn has travelled across the same minefield and found an escape route. Illustration by Karin Heine*

nicotine has cleared from your bloodstream you won't be tempted by cigarettes any more. If that were true, none of us would ever lapse weeks, months or years after giving up. In fact, 80 per cent of people who give up are back on cigarettes within a year.

What Full Stop teaches is the not-too-welcome truth that whenever you first do something or go somewhere that you associated with smoking, you will feel a desire to smoke, however long it is since you stopped, so you might as well go into these smoking-associated circumstances as soon as possible. Have that coffee, go to the pub, be with smoking friends and expect to want to smoke. It will probably be a very strong physical sensation – like a tingling in the mouth, throat, chest or stomach – and it comes from the memory of smoking. (This is *not* nicotine withdrawal, which is simply a light-headedness that may last a day or two.) It

## HEALTH



isn't just the first time you do something without a cigarette that the desire to smoke surfaces. It can and does happen periodically for years, although the desire does become less of an overwhelming physical sensation and more a passing thought. How you deal with all those desires at the times you are having them is what will determine whether you stay an ex-smoker or start smoking again.

The important thing Gillian teaches is not to worry beforehand whether you will make it through that party or that meal without a cigarette. "When people stop smoking, they are quite sure that they will give in and have the cigarette. They are preoccupied with thoughts of failure," says Gillian. "You can alleviate a lot of this fear by being willing not to know what you'll do until you are there doing it. Be willing not to know whether you will stay off smoking for the rest of your life. Every time you are at a party or having a cup of coffee, you have a real choice. Will I smoke or not?"

This choice business is at the heart of the matter. Choosing not to smoke means exactly what it says. Each time you want to smoke, you choose: would I rather have the temporary discomfort associated with wanting a cigarette and not having one, or would I rather be a smoker (because you can't just have one cigarette, of course)?

If you genuinely choose to stop smoking, and therefore see "not smoking" as a choice instead of a deprivation, the emotional experience of stopping changes. Gone are the explosions of temper, the irritability and the wrenching sense of despair which are so often assumed to be the inevitable effect of nicotine withdrawal, but which are really the consequence of thinking, "Oh no, I can't smoke." It is this sense of deprivation that makes not smoking feel worse instead of better as time goes on.

What I found most liberating about this technique was that I no longer needed to run or hide from wanting a cigarette. Nor only could I go anywhere, do anything, be with anyone whether they smoked or not, but I also didn't need to try to deny the desire to smoke by eating and drinking more. Each time the urge hit me, instead of reaching for the biscuits or brandy, I simply weighed up the choice described above – and have opted, so far, for the temporary discomfort.

The Full Stop technique, which has a 75 per cent success rate at one year, drums home a lot of straight truths about smoking. It is, I think, what will stop me succumbing to the sudden, overwhelmingly wonderful memory of a cigarette which may inexplicably overtake me in five years' time at a dinner party where someone is smoking. It is, quite simply and literally, a technique for life.

*'How to Stop Smoking and Stay Stopped for Good' by Gillian Riley is published by the Ebury Press at £5.99.*