



# How to Pick a Quit Date

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QUITTING  
COURSE

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hen you're finally ready to kick the habit, picking a quit date is the first and most essential step towards making your quit stick. But you can't just wake up and say, "*Well today's the day – I'm never smoking again,*" and expect it to pay off. When you quit on impulse, your chances of quitting long-term aren't very good.

Nicotine is incredibly addictive, and cravings will creep up on your half-baked attempt to ditch cigarettes. (Trust me – I tried to stop smoking more than 20 times before I was successful.)

You need a plan. And picking an optimal quit date allows you to create (and follow through with) one.

### ***So when's the best time to quit?***

Yesterday. (Low-hanging fruit, I know.) But the 2nd best time is two weeks from today. Even three weeks can work. (Anything sooner than two weeks isn't ideal, which I get into the Quitting Course, but just try your best to look for something two weeks from today.)

The idea is that *right now* you have a strong desire to quit. You need to use it to your advantage. Seize the moment. The longer you push out your quit date, the more you risk losing that energy. **Use this urge to quit as momentum to propel you towards quitting.**

Obviously, extenuating life circumstances sometimes happen beyond our control. You'll want to schedule your quit date around those, and we'll get

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to them in a bit, but generally speaking, choose a quit date that's 2-3 weeks out.

As for the precise day of the week, I can only offer suggestions based on your habits and preferences; nobody else can pick your quit date but you because everyone's different. It all comes down to your personal lifestyle, living situation, and weekly schedule.

I can, however, guide you towards some inflection points that will help you pick your quit date. (And since you're reading this, chances are that you're here for a reason. You've probably realized that you need to quit and enough is enough, so why not pick your quit date *today*?)

## Here's four questions I ask all my clients:

### Question #1 – “What are your strongest triggers?”

If you're a heavy smoker, you likely have A LOT of triggers that entice you to pick up another pack.

- For me, and many others, drinking alcohol was one of my strongest triggers. (In fact, I once made it 27 days without a cigarette because I was sober for 27 days, only to blow it a few hours after getting drunk.)
- Another strong trigger for me was being caffeinated; drinking coffee in the morning gave me an urge to smoke.

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→ My third top trigger was lunch breaks at work – it didn't *feel* like a break unless I got my nicotine fix.

Other triggers include: *stressful situations, being outdoors, after a meal, after smoking marijuana, seeing/smelling others smoking, driving your car, etc.*

### **So why is it important to identify your strongest triggers?**

By recognizing and respecting your triggers you can more easily work around them – significantly improving your chances of quitting for good!

For example, if you're someone who's used to smoking cigarettes during your regularly scheduled lunch break, a smart strategy might be to pick a Saturday on a holiday weekend to quit. That way, you'll have three days smoke-free under your belt before drudging into work Monday morning.

Alternatively, if you know you're going to be drinking all weekend – let's say for a bachelor party – you would obviously not pick that same Saturday as your quit date. Instead, you might pick the following Monday and switch your break time. Instead of 12:00, maybe you start taking your breaks earlier, or later, or instead, replace your smoke break with a few laps around the building to keep your mind off it. (Exercise is an excellent method to manage cravings!)

By identifying your strongest triggers you can work around them rather than face them head-on during your first few days – the hardest days.

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## Question #2 – “Right now, what’s your biggest source of stress?”

This is an important question to ask yourself because if you’re going through an extremely stressful event in your life, then it's not really not an ideal time to try quitting.

- If you’ve just lost a friend or family member, you should wait until after the funeral.
- If you’re stressing about a job interview or your parents coming to visit for the weekend, you should focus on what’s immediately in front of you.
- If you’re right in the middle of a bad break-up, it’s going to be hard to quit.

I know pushing off your quit date goes against conventional wisdom, but as a smoker of 11 years who tried quitting a few dozen times, **I only succeeded when I made quitting my #1 priority in life.**

To be clear, quitting while going through a stressful situation isn’t *impossible*, but it’s going to be hard. And as many of you know, it’s really tough to pick yourself up and try again after a failed attempt.

Remember when I said I made it 27 days without smoking only to fail when I got drunk? Well, I felt so miserable after that I had to wait 5 more years to actually kick the habit for good.

**I don’t want that to happen to you.**

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Picking a quit date during a “low-stress” time, when you can focus all your spare energy on quitting, is going to drastically increase your chances of stopping successfully.

Now, if the answer to this question, “*What’s your biggest source of stress?*” is more general like *finances* or *work*, you’ll need to flesh out that definition. If you answered *finances*, what do you mean by that? Are you in credit card debt? Okay, so what’s your plan to get out of it?

Write down your goals and a timeline of when money won’t be such a large stressor. Then, work towards that goal! Just like quitting smoking won’t work if you don’t have a plan, you aren’t going to get out of debt without one; if you don’t have a plan to address your largest life concern, you aren’t going to quit smoking – at least long term.

I would like to point out that your nicotine-addicted brain is going to tell you things like, “*Now isn’t the right time, you’re too stressed man!*”

And someone who is depressed, like many smokers are, may think to themselves, “I’m going to be stressed out forever! My life is one big mess so what’s the point in even trying?”

Yes, you’re never going to be 100% stress free – you’ll always have stressors in your life – but you *will* have times of low stress during your life! You just need to look for them.

**Pick a quit date when smoking is your #1 source of stress and largest life concern.**

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I understand that life isn't so clean-cut, though. It gets messy. Curve-balls get thrown your way and unforeseen circumstances can flip your life upside down.

Be patient with yourself and aim to quit when you can give it the attention it deserves; give yourself a month to get over your breakup, then reassess your situation. That said, patience alone won't work.

If you're so miserable at your job, what's your plan to fix it? I've had plenty of awful, soul-sucking, physically crushing jobs in my life, so trust me when I say this: *it won't magically get better*; It's not going to fix itself. You need to do some soul-searching to reduce the stress your job is placing on you.

- *Can you switch departments to work under a different supervisor?*
- *Can you financially afford to take a pay-cut to do a less mentally or physically demanding job?*
- *If you switch jobs/careers, would that likely reduce your stress levels?*
- *Can you take some night classes or online classes to eventually switch careers?*

If you're constantly spending 40+ hours, 5-days-a-week in a state of high-stress, your chances of quitting aren't great. If you're miserable fight your way to improve your living situation. Then, when you're less stressed, focus on quitting smoking.

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## Question #3 – “What’s your weekly schedule look like?”

**Breaking the habit of smoking requires small changes to your daily routine.** If you don’t have a routine and are someone who lives in complete spontaneity and you make your own schedule, then this doesn’t apply to you. However, if you work a 9-to-5 or are a stay-at-home parent, you likely follow a loose schedule. Do you mentally pencil in your smoke breaks in your day-to-day or do you just smoke whenever you get the chance?

It’s possible you smoke so much – especially if you’re a tradesman that works outdoors – that you don’t even think about when or how much you’re smoking. It’s just become second nature to you.

By being cognizant of your lifestyle, you can circumvent your first few “must-have” cigarettes by shifting your schedule. Let’s say you smoke your first cigarette on the way to work. If driving to work is your strongest trigger, maybe pick Saturday as your first day of not smoking instead.

(And if you decide to quit on Monday morning, maybe instead of driving to work you ride your bike or take public transportation. This will break the behavioral trigger associated with your morning cigarette. Of course you’ll crave one at first, but its intensity won’t be as strong and you quite literally cannot smoke one while riding a bike anyway.)

If, like me, you don’t really know your schedule and have a hard time with dates in general, take some mental notes this week (or, for bonus points: physical notes) and see if you can find any consistencies across your day-to-day. Then, when you identify the strongest triggers related to your schedule you can better avoid them.



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## Question #4 – “What’s your next upcoming big life event?”

It’s possible to use that source of stress (see question #2) as a launching point to quit smoking cigarettes. Here’s how:

- Let’s say you’re interviewing for a new job. **Now is not an optimal time to quit.**
- You got the job – go you! – but it’s halfway across the country. You now have less than two weeks to figure out your essential possessions, pack them in boxes, throw the rest into storage, rent a U-Haul, find a place to rent, and drive 17 hours to the East Coast. That sounds awfully stressful – even if it’s “good” stress. **Now is not the best time to quit.**
- Once you’ve completed those tasks and are settled into your new place, **now is the best time to quit!**

Nicotine is so powerful that its triggers are embedded subconsciously into everything we do and everything we see; environmental triggers are a huge part of why people cave into cravings.

So you’re in your routine, driving past the same convenience store at the same time every single day. You go to bed at the same time, wake up at the same time, and eat around the same time. Chances are, you’re smoking at similar intervals as well.

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By busting up your routine and your environment (in this case, moving into a new home in a new state with a new job,) **you have zero established habits**. You get to create them as your days and weeks unfold.

Here's another situation to explain my point, using the same example:

While you're on the East Coast, you'll pass a Sheetz gas station instead of a Kwik Trip. One gas station – the Kwik Trip – subconsciously urges you to light one up because that's where you purchase your cigarettes. The other – Sheetz – does not, because your brain doesn't have a memory (trigger) associated with it. (Yes, your brain is sometimes not that sophisticated.)

Not only do environmental triggers get displaced, but your behavioral habits do as well. The time zone has changed, and so too has your scheduled eating times. You no longer own a patio or an ashtray at your house – now you have an apartment that may not even have a balcony to smoke on.

Of course, you'll still crave cigarettes, but thanks to shuffling up your schedule and surroundings, your cravings will be far less intense and fewer and further in between.

Outside of a move, other big life events that I suggest you try tying into quitting include: after a funeral, after a birthday party, after a bachelor party, after a wedding (or your wedding), first day at a new job, when you get pregnant (women), or after your wife births a child (men).

The sky's the limit – get creative! Only you can really understand which large life event is worth committing your quit to.

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# Putting It All Together

## Picking a Quit Date:

Although picking a good quit date is important, at the end of the day, you just need to pick a date and commit to it. The actual date you choose doesn't really matter – which I know is weird coming from the guy who just wrote this 3,000-word pdf on the topic – but it's true.

Your quit date is just one component – the first component – to a successful quit. When done right, it can help ease some resistance as you pave this new path in life. When done wrong, you can still quit – you'll just face more resistance.

That said, without personally knowing you or your lifestyle, here's a good argument for three different days of the week:

- **Friday:** People are generally in a jolly mood on Fridays. You have the weekend to look forward to and those positive vibes can carry you far when it comes to combating cravings. Saturday and Sunday are likely less structured than your weekdays, which means you won't be so focused on the clock, waiting patiently for your fix. (It also means you can plan to avoid certain events, people, or places that may trigger you on your most vulnerable days.)
- **Saturday:** If you work outdoors and smoking is allowed, or if you work a job with fixed breaks, maybe you can't fathom making your first day of not smoking a workday. The same argument as above goes for

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Saturday and Sunday though, and by the time Monday rolls around, you'll have two full days (and some confidence) heading into your work week.

→ **Monday:** This is the day I personally chose. It gave me the freedom to enjoy my last weekend smoking with one last "hurrah" and get it all out of my system. (As a pack-a-day smoker, I chose to buy two packs and not go to bed until I finished them both.) As you probably guessed, I felt awful on Monday. So awful, the thought of having a cigarette wasn't at all appealing to me. The cravings hit me a few days in, but thanks to creating a strong negative trigger I could associate with smoking, I got through the first part – the hardest part – of my week. It was smooth(er) sailing after that!  
(Another bonus for Monday was that it was the start of a fresh week. I thought, "If I can get through this during a fixed schedule for the next five days, I'll have five days smoke-free under my belt by the time the big, bad, scary weekend comes along!")

## Preparing for your Quit Date:

Tell the people you love that you've decided to quit and tell them your quit date. Ask them for their support and encouragement, and that you might seem irritated or crabby while you're going through nicotine withdrawals.

(For more tips and tricks on this topic, try [the Quitting Course](#).)

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# Conclusion:

Unfortunately, there isn't a magic pill or cure-all to quitting smoking. (Although, with a [93% student success rate](#), my Quitting Course might be the closest thing.)

You're never going to find the perfect day to quit because it doesn't exist. So stop looking for it! There's no certainty with *anything* in life, so the best we can do is take some time to reflect (ask yourself the above questions,) and then make an educated guess to which date suits you best.

Choose a date two or three weeks from today that *will not change*. Stick to it! Put it on your calendar and remind your people that you're quitting on that date.

Your first week will be your most vulnerable week, so it's important to pick a date that can propel you past the first few days without giving you too much grief.

Lastly, and more importantly, **you can do this!**

My method is tried-and-true, and I wouldn't have spent all this time and energy creating these resources, a community of quitters, and an online quitting course if I didn't 100% believe that anyone can quit. It's cliché but it's true: if I can do it, so can you!

Thanks for reading and best of luck,

→ Steven Schilling, Former Smoker