

Quitting Made Real by NICORETTE®: Podcast Episode 4 Transcript: Jennifer Wang (ENGLISH)

Runtime: 17:09

SPEAKERS:

Jennifer Wang (Left), Cynthia Loyst (Right)

[We open on Cynthia Loyst, podcast host, wearing a red shirt while sitting in a green chair. Behind her is a white spinnaker-shaped sign with "Quitting Made Real" in dark green, and a NICORETTE® logo in the top right. Plants are in the background, and NICORETTE® products are displayed on her left. A microphone sits in front of her.]

00:00:00:03 - 00:00:19:06

Cynthia

Welcome to Quitting Made Real by Nicorette, the podcast bringing you real stories about breaking the smoking addiction. My name is Cynthia Loyst, and I will say that quitting smoking is one of the single best things I have ever done for myself. We have an incredible lineup of guests, and they're sharing their unique stories of how everyone affected by nicotine addiction can help make quitting real.

00:00:19:06 - 00:00:46:21

Cynthia

Jennifer Wang is a pharmacist turned Toronto fashion icon who has used her health care background to help her partner quit smoking. Jennifer joins us now. Thanks for being here, Jennifer. [Camera pans to include Jennifer, who is wearing a white buttoned shirt] So, Jennifer, I know for myself, when I started smoking in high school, I could kind of take it or leave it. So I didn't really understand the concept of an addiction. So can you break down how nicotine addiction works and why it becomes so challenging to quit?

00:00:46:21 - 00:01:06:16

Jennifer

Oh for sure. So I think where we start with is anatomy of the lungs. So lungs are made essentially to, you know, transfer gases between the air and your blood really fast. So when we smoke, that nicotine hits our lung tissue and then it goes into our blood really quickly, within seconds I would say. And then that nicotine goes into your brain.

00:01:06:17 - 00:01:53:17

Jennifer

So that's what stimulates the dopamine release. And that plays into our reward program. So it makes us feel good. It could give us like a head rush. Maybe it makes us feel relaxed, makes us feel happy and good. Right. But that only lasts a few seconds. [Cynthia interjects: Yep] And then we want to take another puff of that cigarette, and then another and another cigarette.

So that's the effect that reinforces that behaviour. When you don't have that nicotine anymore you have

these symptoms of withdrawal. So I'm sure you know, some headache, maybe some mood changes, maybe an increase in appetite, difficulty in focusing or concentrating. And that's what's just enough drive us to pick up that cigarette again. So that's just, the cycle of addiction. It's hard to break that cycle.

And that's why we need, like, you know, tools in our, in our toolbox here, like nicotine replacement therapy.

00:01:53:18 - 00:02:39:08

Cynthia

So it's interesting, the way I had heard it described once was it's like a Venus flytrap, right? That you're like the fly and you go down and initially you don't realize that you're caught and you think because you can see the light around you imagining if you're a fly, okay, you can fly out at any given point in time until you realize you're actually being swallowed whole. [Jennifer interjects in agreement]

And that really resonated with me, when it is described like that. And you're right, like, I can relate to that feeling and that sensation of, well, initially it felt horrible to smoke. And then you get that dopamine hit, that feeling of euphoria. And then it's almost like when you're in the locks of the addiction every hour there's like this invisible monkey on your back that's telling you, you know, okay, you got to scratch this itch. You have to get another cigarette in order to just feel fine again.

00:02:39:08 - 00:02:40:06

Jennifer

Feel normal. Exactly.

00:02:40:07 - 00:02:44:17

Cynthia

And then you're chasing that kind of, that cycle and that feeling forever after.

00:02:44:18 - 00:02:45:08

Jennifer

Exactly.

00:02:45:09 - 00:02:49:12

Cynthia

What are some, would you say, common struggles for people attempting to quit smoking?

00:02:49:13 - 00:03:34:19

Jennifer

I think a big part is having those, having to deal with those withdrawal symptoms. And then I think the aspect that most people don't think about is that it can maybe isolate you socially, especially if your friends are all smokers or people at work all want to take a smoke break together. I think it's not as simple as just quitting that that action, that task.

It's like a whole life transformation, right? All aspects of your life have to change. You also have to think about the mental health piece of it. Because, you know, I think we often think of, you know, someone picking up a cigarette just because, but maybe because it's like a method of coping or there's some other reason behind it that, you know, if you quit smoking, then that person might be inclined to try other vices.

Right? So I think it's just like a holistic piece, a bigger picture than just the action of smoking.

00:03:34:20 - 00:04:14:23

Cynthia

It's so true. I remember for myself, one of the biggest struggles was just kind of feeling like, can I cope with this moment, this stressful moment? Will I be able to cope with any kind of discomfort in my life without having this crutch that was so reliable? It was almost like a friend to me, or at least like a kind of an evil friend [Jennifer and Cynthia both laugh].

But it was like this, this kind of presence in my life that I had gotten so familiar with. And you're right, I had, I had all these associations. Like, I think people who are smokers will recognize, like, I like it when I have it with my coffee, or I like it when I have it with a drink, or I'm with my friends.

And so, at least for a time, I think that there's going to be that, you have to disassociate all of those trigger points.

00:04:14:23 - 00:04:15:14

Jennifer

Exactly.

00:04:15:14 - 00:05:03:16

Cynthia

But I mean, I'm here to say that I got through all of that and I can still have a drink, and I can still have a coffee, and I can still hang out with my friends. And I do not miss that at all anymore.

Quitting smoking was challenging, but I was so grateful that I had a bunch of different strategies that I used at once. And I think that that's important for people to recognize that you might need to discover what is your quit smoking strategy and what kind of supports you need.

I used a nicotine patch. A NicoDerm patch. At first it was really helpful to know that I had this, this thing inside of me that was stopping some of the discomfort. [Jennifer interjects: Right.] And then, of course, the gum was hugely helpful for me in those moments where I thought, okay, I'm not going to be able to make it through this conversation [they both laugh] without having something, in my back pocket.

Can you break down how products like Nicorette work so effectively to manage cravings?

00:05:03:17 - 00:05:34:21

Jennifer

Yeah. So, compared to smoking, where it's like a really fast hit of nicotine and fast delivery of dopamine, nicotine replacement products like Nicorette will deliver nicotine much more slowly. So it doesn't give you that head rush, that dopamine rush, but it's going to take away some of those withdrawal symptoms. So for example, the gum, as you said you have experience using, that's going to give you the nicotine released through your buccal tissue in your cheeks.

Right. So that's going to take maybe up to 15, 30 minutes for that nicotine to hit your bloodstream compared to the cigarette, which is going to hit your bloodstream in like seconds. So it's —

00:05:34:22 - 00:05:39:22

Cynthia

Yeah. Is it still the also the methodology where you sort of take a couple of bites and then you park it?

00:05:39:23 - 00:06:12:05

Jennifer

Exactly. So the chew and park method. Right. I think most people and I'm guilty of that is when I start using something new, I don't maybe read the instructions. So if you look at a package of nicotine gum, if you never try that, you might just assume that you chew it like a normal piece of gum. But you actually have to, you know, use that chew like you chew it for a bit.

And then it gets a tingly sensation, you put it between your cheek, and then you let that nicotine absorb through the tissues. And then, you do that for about every 30 minutes and then that's going to get that nicotine release through that tissue. Because if you're just chewing like, like a normal piece of gum, you're not going to get that nicotine release.

00:06:12:06 - 00:06:21:00

Cynthia

Yeah, yeah. And then the lozenges and the mists, those are newer products, or at least I wasn't aware of them when I was quitting smoking. So the lozenges, explain how that works.

00:06:21:01 - 00:06:35:09

Jennifer

Yeah, so similar to the gum, the lozenge has a nicotine deposit in in the lozenge itself. And then you park that between your, your teeth tissue and then that gets absorbed a bit quicker than the gum I would say. And similar to the mist you spray in your mouth and it gets absorbed through your mouth and cheek tissues.

00:06:35:10 - 00:06:41:06

Cynthia

Can you talk about some of the common misconceptions about the use of Nicorette gum as a quitting smoking strategy?

00:06:41:07 - 00:07:20:13

Jennifer

I think some misconceptions is that people might think that it's just as bad as smoking because it also contains nicotine, but the fact is that, you know, the gum doesn't contain a lot of the other harmful substances, and that cigarettes have right. So we're talking about the tar, the carbon monoxide, all those other chemicals that form where you combust cigarettes.

So the nicotine gum is really just to deliver that nicotine alone. So that's really just the part that we need to curb those withdrawal symptoms and curb those cravings. But it's not going to give you all those other carcinogenic substances like a cigarette would. And then, we had already talked about, you know, the method of chewing the gum. So misconceptions might be you chew like a normal piece of gum, but there's that chew and park method that we have to use.

00:07:20:14 - 00:07:37:00

Cynthia

Yeah, I feel like there's no single person who hasn't been impacted by smoking in some way, whether or not it's because they've tried it themselves or they've had a loved one who have been impacted by smoking. Can you share your experience in helping others, whether patients or loved ones, on their journey to quit?

00:07:37:01 - 00:09:01:08

Jennifer

Right now I'm on a respirology unit. So I see all sorts of lung cancer patients and even younger patients who vape, who maybe come in with different, pulmonary problems, like there's like the increasing prevalence of something called popcorn lung in vapers.

And that's just like a disease in inflammation, it's scarring in the lung tissue that I think most people aren't aware of, especially for vapes, because you think of them as water vapour and you maybe overestimate their safety. I think as a pharmacist, you know, being able to prescribe some of these nicotine replacement products and just helping patients in their journey of smoking cessation, I think I realized that I think a lot of people do want to quit, but they need to be equipped with the tools and they need some support and help along the way.

So just as, just in talking to a lot of my patients, you know, I think what prompts a lot of people to start thinking about quitting is they get a health scare. So maybe something weird shows up on their labs or something shows up on an annual, and then they start thinking about it, but then they try themselves, you know, to quit cold turkey.

And that usually ends up relapsing, right? Patients, trying to quit cold turkey, I think 90% plus will end up

relapsing. But with the use of nicotine replacement products that, the success rate of increasing your quitting actually increased by 3 to 5 times. So that's actually much higher. Right? So I think in my experience it's just a matter of giving these patients the support they need and just the tools that they need.

00:09:01:09 - 00:09:32:05

Cynthia

Well, I think anyone listening who's struggling with quitting smoking, like I want people to know that they can do it, and it may take a couple of attempts and you might need support. You probably will need support. And it's actually, there is another side to it. And I'm here to say like how joyful, and it is one of the things that I'm most proudest of, that I got to the other side of that.

Were you ever a smoker yourself? Or do you have any personal experience with dealing directly with somebody who, who is, or has smoked?

00:09:32:05 - 00:10:12:04

Jennifer

So I have never been a smoker myself. But it's funny because when I was on my first date with my now husband, he was a smoker at the time. I remember we were walking to the restaurant we were going to, and I found out he was a smoker on the way, and I basically almost left because I really wanted to be with someone who prioritizes their health.

And when I found out, I was like, oh, maybe this is not the right connection. Maybe this is, you know, not the right fit for us. And then, you know, he was very charming. He said, we're almost at the restaurant, why don't you come and just enjoy the meal anyway? And then, you know, throughout our conversation at the restaurant, you know, he told me that he was actually thinking about quitting.

And, I think that was maybe the little final push that he needed to get that journey going.

00:10:12:05 - 00:10:38:11

Cynthia

You helped him get over that. So how okay, so, like, this is an interesting thing, because the same thing in my partnership, I was the smoker when I got together with my husband and I think it was an almost deal breaker initially. And I think it is for a lot of people out there, though, you know, being on the dating scene and you'll be like, oh, they're a smoker. No way.

So how was it? I remember what my partner went through while I was quitting smoking. I'm curious what it was like for you while your partner was quitting.

00:10:38:12 - 00:10:54:11

Jennifer

I think for us it was a little bit easier because he was never that heavy of a smoker. So we never had

those, like severe mood changes that I noticed. It was more of, you know, we would go on a cottage trip, his buddies will have a cigarette, and then he'll look at me with those puppy eyes, like [Jennifer opens her eyes wide and blinks with her hands clasped].

00:10:54:12 - 00:10:56:09

Cynthia

Like, can I?

00:10:56:09 - 00:10:57:10

Jennifer

[Laughing] Can I have a puff?

00:10:57:10 - 00:11:40:16

Jennifer

So it's just like, I think for us, it was important for me to give him autonomy and like, his, give him his own space to make his own decisions. Because it's not a matter of, you know, he loves me so much, he's going to do this for me. It's he's really doing it for himself and to improve his own health. Right?

So it wasn't so much as me setting the rules. It was, you know, I think a large piece was just educating him on, like, the harmful effects of smoking on his own health, but also on the health of people around him and the long-term effects, just not even just related to, like, the physical health piece, but also the mental health piece.

So I think, just having that support, having that education that really helped him, get his journey along.

00:11:40:18 - 00:11:52:15

Cynthia

That's great. I mean, you had that education to provide. to him.

So Nicorette works with health care professionals to assist patients in their quit process. How did your clinical background guide your approach to helping your partner quit?

00:11:52:16 - 00:12:39:19

Jennifer

Yeah, so I think most of my expertise was picked up on the psychiatric unit where I was helping a lot of patients, quit smoking. And as part of our hospital's policy, pharmacists can actually prescribe nicotine replacement products as part of a medical directive. So I was doing a lot of that. So just, you know, I think in a hospital setting especially, it's a great opportunity for patients to try some of these nicotine replacement products because they're in the hospital setting.

They can't necessarily go outside and have a smoke or what they would normally do because they're admitted in the hospital. So a lot of these patients, they try these products and they realize they're

actually really helpful to curb their cravings and their withdrawal symptoms. And then they actually end up using these products outside the hospital to further along their quit journeys.

So I think it's like a really special and like, important piece that I've got to participate in. And it's been yeah, it's been really awesome.

00:12:39:20 - 00:12:48:12

Cynthia

That's so great. How has supporting someone through quitting, whether it's patients or your partner, changed the way you think about health and wellness in general?

00:12:48:13 - 00:13:28:01

Jennifer

I think what I learned from my experience is that it's a journey. It's not just a one-off thing that you do. It's like going to be, every decision that you make for the rest of your life. And also it kind of removes some of the stigma for me because I think previously, before I got into this field, I might just think, you know, why can't people just quit smoking like they know how bad it is for them, like why? Why can't they just put it down? But, I think, you know, just speaking with patients, speaking with my husband through his quitting journey, I come to realize as it's like more difficult and more, it's bigger than just someone's willpower, right? It's going to be, it's going to take more than just willpower to quit because it's such a complex process.

00:13:28:02 - 00:13:52:06

Cynthia

One of the things that I feel like people aren't told enough is how, I found it very empowering to realize that after a few days, that nicotine addiction has subsided quite a bit, to the point where it's actually quite much more manageable. So, maybe you can speak to like that process of the period of adjustment, that that happens over the period of months that you might be quitting.

00:13:52:07 - 00:14:01:10

Jennifer

When people think about quitting, they really have to think of it as a journey. And in a journey, you know, there's going to be bumps on the road. There's going to be, it's not going to be maybe.

00:14:01:11 - 00:14:02:10

Cynthia

A straight line.

00:14:02:11 - 00:14:36:03

Jennifer

Yeah, exactly, it might not be a straight line. It might not take one time to make, to be successful. And the most important thing in the journey is to be persistent. Right? So I think, just like knowing that, and

also what I find really encouraging for patients is that when they learn about, like, how much their health improves even after stopping smoking for a day or two days, like a week.

There's like statistics to show you that, you know, your health dramatically improves after you stop smoking for even an hour. And whenever I hear patients quit smoking, that's like the, I tell them, like, that's the best thing you can do for your health. You're already so far along.

00:14:36:04 - 00:14:40:17

Cynthia

How can people tailor their quitting strategy to their smoking experience?

00:14:40:18 - 00:15:24:02

Jennifer

I think depending on, you know, your habits as a smoker, depending on how much you smoked, there's so many different options out there that you can really tailor that, that nicotine replacement therapy to your own smoking habits, right? So, for example, if you're a heavy smoker, you might need that, constant delivery of nicotine through a nicotine patch.

And then if you have acute cravings, you might want to try something like a gum or a lozenge or an inhaler or a puffer, mister. So you can really use these different combinations in combination therapy to treat, to help on your quitting journey. So, and also like depending on your habits, for example, if you just like that motion of putting a cigarette to your mouth, you might really like the inhaler better than a gum or a lozenge.

So yeah, there's lots of different options for people out there and you can really tailor that.

00:15:24:03 - 00:15:36:13

Cynthia

You mentioned before about modern nicotine products like e-cigarettes. We know they've been gaining popularity. It's something that terrifies me as a parent as well. How do you feel about their role as a quitting tool?

00:15:36:14 - 00:16:13:21

Jennifer

I honestly don't think they make a very good quitting tool because actually, because of the flavour profile, because of that overestimation in their safety, people tend to consume more nicotine through e-cigarettes or vapes than they would through a cigarette, because those cartridges contain various amounts and sometimes you don't realize how much nicotine is contained in that one cartridge.

And if you're smoking, maybe half or a full cartridge per day, that's much more than a pack or two packs of cigarettes. And you don't even realize it. And we see actually the increased prevalence of lung disease, in young people who use vapes. So conditions like popcorn lung, which is like an inflammation,

a scarring of the lung tissue.

00:16:13:21 - 00:16:16:11

Cynthia

It's not cute. It's actually not as cute as it sounds by any means.

00:16:16:11 - 00:16:26:22

Jennifer

Exactly. And even younger people who just come in with spontaneous pneumothorax, which is a collapsing of the lung, we're seeing that in like teenagers, 20-year-olds and yeah, it's related to vaping.

00:16:26:22 - 00:16:45:10

Cynthia

It's terrifying. Well, it's so interesting because I've noticed that there's been a few people in my life who have noticed who are like, okay, I'm no longer I don't smoke anymore, but they're vaping and they're vaping way more [Jennifer interjects, nodding: Yeah] than they did when they were smoking.

My observation as an outsider is they become increasingly hooked often and yeah, it seems like a terrible quit smoking strategy.

00:16:45:11 - 00:16:47:14

Jennifer

No absolutely, wouldn't recommend that at all.

00:16:47:15 - 00:16:58:16

Cynthia

Jennifer, thanks so much for joining the Quitting Made Real podcast by Nicorette today, and thanks for sharing your journey with us. If you're listening and thinking about quitting, remember, it's never too late to make quitting real.

00:16:59:02

[Against a green background, white text appears reading "Next Episode Coming October 2025". Below are two website URLs; Nicorette.ca/quittingmadereal and Nicorette.ca/fr/ArreterPourDeBon. The NICORETTE® Quitting Made Real is across the bottom of the green background.]

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