

# Mindfulness Training For Smoking Cessation

Garrison et al. *BMC Psychiatry* (2015) 15:83  
DOI 10.1186/s12888-015-0468-z



STUDY PROTOCOL

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## A randomized controlled trial of smartphone-based mindfulness training for smoking cessation: a study protocol

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### Abstract

**Background:** Tobacco use is responsible for the death of about 1 in 10 individuals worldwide. Mindfulness training has shown preliminary efficacy as a behavioral treatment for smoking cessation. Recent advances in mobile health suggest advantages to smartphone-based smoking cessation treatment including smartphone-based mindfulness training. This study evaluates the efficacy of a smartphone app-based mindfulness training program for improving smoking cessation rates at 6-months follow-up.

**Methods/Design:** A two-group parallel-randomized clinical trial with allocation concealment will be conducted. Group assignment will be concealed from study researchers through to follow-up. The study will be conducted by smartphone and online. Daily smokers who are interested in quitting smoking and own a smartphone ( $n = 140$ ) will be recruited through study advertisements posted online. After completion of a baseline survey, participants will be allocated randomly to the control or intervention group. Participants in both groups will receive a 22-day smartphone-based treatment program for smoking. Participants in the intervention group will receive mobile mindfulness training plus experience sampling. Participants in the control group will receive experience sampling-only. The primary outcome measure will be one-week point prevalence abstinence from smoking (at 6-months follow-up) assessed using carbon monoxide breath monitoring, which will be validated through smartphone-based video chat.

**Discussion:** This is the first intervention study to evaluate smartphone-based delivery of mindfulness training for smoking cessation. Such an intervention may provide treatment in-hand, in real-world contexts, to help individuals quit smoking.

**Trial registration:** Clinicaltrials.gov NCT02134509. Registered 7 May 2014.

**Keywords:** Smoking, Smoking cessation, Mindfulness, Meditation, Smartphone application, App, Mobile health, Craving, Mood, Experience sampling, Ecological momentary assessment

### Background

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death worldwide [1]. Although over 70% of smokers want to quit, fewer than 5% achieve this annually [2]. Behavioral treatments teach individuals strategies to avoid smoking triggers, or to foster positive affective states, reduce negative mood, reduce stress by exercise or relaxation, divert attention from cravings, substitute other activities for smoking, or to develop social support mechanisms

[3,4]. These approaches have only modest success, with 6–12 month abstinence rates of 20–30% [5,6]. Their limited success may be due to the fact that smoking triggers are always present, making avoidance difficult; diversion of attention requires cognitive resources which are often depleted after strong affective states [7]; and effective substitutions are not always readily available.

Recent work suggests that mindfulness training may be an effective behavioral treatment for smoking by targeting stress, craving and learned responses. Mindfulness training has been adapted as a central component of some contemporary psychotherapy and has shown some efficacy in the treatment of psychiatric disorders relating

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## Understanding Mindfulness Training for Smoking Cessation

**Mindfulness training for smoking cessation** has emerged as a powerful tool in the battle against tobacco addiction. This approach utilizes mindfulness techniques to help individuals become more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and cravings associated with smoking. By developing a deeper understanding of these aspects, individuals can learn to respond to their urges in healthier ways, ultimately leading to successful cessation.

As smoking remains one of the leading causes of preventable deaths globally, effective cessation

strategies are crucial. Traditional methods often include nicotine replacement therapies, medications, and behavioral counseling. However, mindfulness training offers a complementary or alternative approach that focuses on mental awareness and emotional regulation, which can significantly enhance the smoking cessation process.

## **The Science Behind Mindfulness and Smoking Cessation**

Mindfulness is defined as the psychological process of bringing one's attention to the present moment without judgment. It encompasses meditation, breathing exercises, and various awareness techniques aimed at fostering a non-reactive state of mind. Research indicates several mechanisms through which mindfulness can aid in smoking cessation:

### **1. Increased Awareness of Triggers**

Mindfulness training encourages individuals to become more aware of their smoking triggers, whether they are emotional states, environmental cues, or social situations. By recognizing these triggers, smokers can develop strategies to cope with them more effectively.

### **2. Enhanced Emotional Regulation**

Many individuals smoke to cope with stress, anxiety, or other negative emotions. Mindfulness training helps participants learn to respond to these emotions without resorting to smoking. This improved emotional regulation can lead to a decrease in cravings and a greater sense of control.

### **3. Reduced Craving Responses**

Mindfulness practices such as meditation have been shown to diminish the intensity of cravings. By focusing on the present moment and observing cravings as temporary sensations rather than immediate demands, individuals can reduce their likelihood of succumbing to the urge to smoke.

### **4. Improved Coping Strategies**

Mindfulness training equips individuals with tools to manage stress and anxiety, which are often significant barriers to quitting smoking. Techniques such as deep breathing, body scans, and mindful observation can be integrated into daily routines to improve overall well-being.

# Implementing Mindfulness Training in Smoking Cessation Programs

Incorporating mindfulness training into smoking cessation programs can be achieved through various formats, including group sessions, individual counseling, or self-help resources. Here are some practical steps to implement mindfulness training effectively:

## 1. Structured Mindfulness Programs

Many organizations offer structured mindfulness programs designed specifically for smoking cessation. These programs typically include:

- Guided meditation sessions
- Mindful breathing exercises
- Group discussions on the challenges of quitting
- Journaling to track thoughts and cravings

Participants can benefit from the collective experience and support of others who are on the same journey.

## 2. Integration with Traditional Cessation Methods

Mindfulness training can be integrated with traditional smoking cessation techniques. For example, a comprehensive program might include:

1. **Behavioral Therapy:** Combining mindfulness with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can help participants identify and challenge negative thought patterns associated with smoking.
2. **Nicotine Replacement Therapy:** Mindfulness can enhance the effectiveness of nicotine patches or gum by addressing the psychological aspects of addiction.
3. **Support Groups:** Facilitating mindfulness exercises within support group settings can strengthen community bonds and provide additional encouragement.

### **3. Online Mindfulness Resources**

With the rise of digital health, many online resources offer mindfulness training for smoking cessation. These can include:

- Apps with guided meditations specifically targeting smoking cessation
- Online courses or webinars led by mindfulness experts
- Virtual support groups for accountability and encouragement

Utilizing technology allows individuals to engage in mindfulness practice at their convenience.

## **Personal Experiences and Case Studies**

The effectiveness of mindfulness training for smoking cessation can be highlighted through personal experiences and case studies. Research has shown promising results in various studies:

### **Case Study: Mindfulness-Based Smoking Cessation Program**

In a study involving a mindfulness-based smoking cessation program, participants who engaged in regular mindfulness meditation reported a significant reduction in craving intensity and the number of cigarettes smoked per day. The findings suggested that those who practiced mindfulness were more likely to maintain abstinence six months after the program concluded compared to those who used traditional cessation methods alone.

### **Personal Experience: A Journey to Quit Smoking**

Consider the story of Sarah, a 32-year-old woman who struggled with smoking for over a decade. After multiple unsuccessful attempts to quit, she enrolled in a mindfulness-based program. Through guided meditations and mindfulness exercises, Sarah learned to identify her triggers and cope with cravings. Instead of reaching for a cigarette during stressful moments, she practiced deep breathing and focused on the sensations in her body. After six months of consistent practice, Sarah successfully quit smoking and reported feeling more in control of her thoughts and emotions.

## **Challenges and Considerations**

While mindfulness training offers numerous benefits, there are challenges and considerations to keep in mind:

## 1. Individual Differences

Not all individuals may respond equally to mindfulness training. Factors such as personality, readiness to change, and prior experiences with mindfulness can influence outcomes. Tailoring programs to meet individual needs can enhance effectiveness.

## 2. Commitment to Practice

Mindfulness training requires commitment and consistency. Individuals need to dedicate time to practice regularly for the benefits to manifest fully. This can be a barrier for those with busy schedules or a lack of motivation.

## 3. Potential Misunderstandings

Some individuals may misunderstand mindfulness as a quick fix for smoking cessation. It's essential to communicate that mindfulness is a skill that requires practice and patience, much like any other form of training.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, **mindfulness training for smoking cessation** presents a valuable approach for individuals seeking to quit smoking. By fostering awareness, enhancing emotional regulation, and providing effective coping strategies, mindfulness can complement traditional cessation methods and significantly improve the likelihood of success.

As more research emerges, the integration of mindfulness into smoking cessation programs may become increasingly prevalent, offering a holistic pathway to recovery. Ultimately, the journey to quitting smoking is deeply personal, and mindfulness can serve as a powerful ally in overcoming the challenges associated with tobacco addiction. Whether through structured programs, online resources, or self-directed practice, individuals are encouraged to explore mindfulness as a viable option in their journey toward a smoke-free life.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is mindfulness training in the context of smoking cessation?

Mindfulness training for smoking cessation involves techniques that help individuals become more aware of their cravings, triggers, and responses to stress, enabling them to manage their urges to smoke without automatically resorting to cigarettes.

## **How does mindfulness help reduce cravings for cigarettes?**

Mindfulness helps reduce cravings by promoting a non-judgmental awareness of thoughts and feelings, allowing individuals to observe their cravings without acting on them, which can weaken the habitual response to smoke.

## **Can mindfulness training be combined with other smoking cessation methods?**

Yes, mindfulness training can be effectively combined with other methods such as nicotine replacement therapies, counseling, and behavioral therapies to enhance overall effectiveness in quitting smoking.

## **What techniques are commonly used in mindfulness training for smoking cessation?**

Common techniques include meditation, deep breathing exercises, body scans, and mindful walking, all aimed at increasing present-moment awareness and reducing impulsive smoking behavior.

## **Is mindfulness training effective for all smokers?**

Mindfulness training can be effective for many smokers, but its effectiveness may vary based on individual differences, including personal motivation, prior experiences with quitting, and the presence of co-occurring mental health issues.

## **How long does it typically take to see results from mindfulness training for smoking cessation?**

Results can vary; some individuals may notice changes in their cravings and smoking behavior within a few weeks, while others may require several months of consistent practice to experience significant benefits.

## **Are there any specific studies supporting the use of mindfulness for quitting smoking?**

Yes, several studies have shown that mindfulness-based interventions can significantly reduce smoking rates and cravings, with some research indicating that these approaches can also improve mental well-being during the cessation process.

## **What resources are available for those interested in mindfulness training for smoking cessation?**

Resources include mobile apps, online courses, support groups, and workshops specifically designed for smokers, as well as books and guided meditation recordings focused on mindfulness and smoking cessation.

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Discover how mindfulness training for smoking cessation can help you quit smoking effectively. Transform your journey to a smoke-free life today!

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