

Your Tobacco Loop

Notice the pattern. Create a pause. Choose your next step.

Tobacco use can become an automatic learned routine. A cue—such as coffee, stress, driving, boredom, or being around people who use tobacco—can trigger an urge before you have time to think about it.

The goal is not to never have an urge. The goal is to notice the loop early enough to create a pause between the urge and using tobacco.

**Trigger → Thought/Feeling → Urge → Tobacco Use → Short-Term Relief
→ Stronger Habit**

Cravings are temporary. They can feel intense, but they are not commands. Identifying personal triggers and making a plan before cravings arise can make them easier to manage.

How the loop works

Step	What it means	My example
1. Trigger	Something happens that reminds my brain of tobacco	
2. Thought or feeling	I have a thought, emotion, or body sensation	
3. Urge	I experience a craving or pull to use tobacco	
4. Automatic response	I smoke, vape, dip, chew, or use another tobacco product	
5. Short-term payoff	I briefly feel relief, distraction, comfort, stimulation, or connection	
6. Long-term cost	The habit becomes stronger and tobacco continues to take time, money, health, or freedom	

Step	Example
Trigger	I pour my morning coffee
Thought or feeling	"Coffee is not the same without a cigarette."
Urge	Restlessness; a strong desire to smoke
Automatic response	I smoke outside or in the car
Short-term payoff	Brief relief and completion of a familiar routine
Long-term cost	Coffee becomes more strongly connected with smoking, making future mornings harder

Common tobacco triggers.

Check the triggers that are part of your routine.

Routine and activity triggers

- ☐ Waking up
- ☐ Drinking coffee, tea, or an energy drink
- ☐ After meals
- ☐ Driving or being in traffic
- ☐ Work breaks
- ☐ Talking on the phone
- ☐ Watching television, gaming, or scrolling
- ☐ Waiting in line or having unstructured time
- ☐ Before bed
- ☐ Alcohol or going out socially

Emotional triggers

- ☐ Stress or feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ Anxiety or nervousness

- ☐ Anger, conflict, or frustration
- ☐ Boredom or restlessness
- ☐ Sadness, loneliness, or disappointment
- ☐ Excitement, celebration, or reward
- ☐ Feeling like “I deserve a break”

Social and environmental triggers

- ☐ Being around others who smoke, vape, dip, or chew
- ☐ Seeing tobacco products, lighters, ashtrays, or vape devices
- ☐ Smelling smoke or vapor
- ☐ Being in a familiar smoking location
- ☐ Taking a break with coworkers or friends
- ☐ Buying tobacco products or passing a usual store

My pause plan

When you notice a trigger, try this sequence:

1. Name it

Say to yourself:

“This is a trigger.”

“This is an urge, not an instruction.”

“I can pause before I choose.”

My most common trigger is:

2. Rate the urge

Right now, my urge is: _____

0 = no urge; 10 = strongest urge imaginable

3. Pause and breathe

Take a slow breathe in through your nose and breathe out slowly through your mouth.

Remind yourself:

“I can let this urge rise and fall.”

“I do not have to act on this feeling immediately.”

“Every pause strengthens my ability to choose.”

4. Choose a replacement action

Pick one or two actions you can realistically.

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| ☐ Drink water. | ☐ Use a puzzle, game, or brief distraction. |
| ☐ Chew gum or have sugar-free candy. | ☐ Hold something in my hand, such as a pen, worry stone, straw, or stress ball. |
| ☐ Brush my teeth or use mouthwash. | ☐ Use nicotine-replacement medication or another cessation medication exactly as prescribed or directed. |
| ☐ Take a brief walk or climb stairs. | ☐ Remind myself of my reason for quitting. |
| ☐ Stretch, shake it out, or change rooms. | |
| ☐ Text or call someone supportive. | |
| ☐ Listen to one song. | |

My go-to replacement action:

My backup action:

5. Revisit the urge

After a few minutes, ask:

- “What is my urge level now, from 0 to 10?”
 - “What helped even a little?”
 - “What do I need for the next five minutes?”
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