

By Jasmine White – Niagara County Community Champion

I was a smoker for about 15-20 years. Which is crazy to think it was that long because I don't recall myself smoking cigarettes much as a teenager.

I started out just trying it and eventually buying my own.

The funny part about me smoking is that I hated the smell. I thought if I didn't smoke as soon as I woke up in the morning, I wasn't addicted. I was wrong. That myth is just that... a myth. I would smoke about a half a pack a day which doesn't seem like a lot but I would smoke more once I was out of work since I had more free time. So a cigarette an hour when I was home is what I would average.

I caught COVID in January 2022 and I didn't want a cigarette after that. It wasn't that easy. My body still craved the nicotine. I would feel this rush of anxiousness, chest pains, panic when my body craved a cigarette. I didn't want to go back to smoking so I substituted with vaping. That wasn't much better. I bought the vapes that you fill the cartridge with nicotine thinking "I had more control" over my consumption/usage. Again, I didn't. The vape allowed me to freely smoke in places (like my house) that I wouldn't smoke in before so that made me smoke more.

The flavors were good. I liked the flavors I could choose from. Then I found myself wanting to smoke because I wanted to taste it. I found myself smoking more with the vape than I did cigarettes.

I had a friend that was smoking Hydes and quit because he was having chest pains. He got x-rays, stopped smoking but ended up passing away a week later. Initially, his fiancé (my best friend) thought it was because of the chest pains he had when he was smoking the Hydes. Inevitably, it wasn't. He had a heart condition that caused his passing.

However, that scared me enough to stop vaping, that day. I put it down and haven't touched nicotine since.

I say I was fortunate because I had these events that occurred that helped me to stop smoking. I still feel the effects of not having nicotine.

I would have triggers that would make me want to smoke. When I would get aggravated, I would want a cigarette to "calm down". I feel the anxious feeling when my body craves the nicotine.

I always joked that I shouldn't be a smoker. I wouldn't smoke when I first woke up or tried not to within the first hour of waking...thinking that didn't make me addicted.

I didn't smoke a pack a day like some people.

But even with these things... I was still addicted. I tried to quit on my own. But I would find myself restless and smoke at least 2 a day which went back up to a half a pack.

I am so proud of myself for quitting and not going back. Especially, not vaping. I have been nicotine free for 2 years and try to help people cut down or quit. It's an amazing feeling to kick a habit you never thought you could get rid of. Without smoking, I feel more energetic and healthier.

I breathe better, I am more active and feel less groggy throughout the day.

Not smoking also allowed me to deal with my stressors differently and not turn to smoking.