

## Brief Motivational Interview May Help People Quit Smoking

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In a new research project, scientists from the University of Granada in Spain found that motivational interviewing enables smokers to see tobacco as something disagreeable and can help smokers kick the habit.

A goal-oriented approach to psychotherapy, motivational interviewing expresses empathy and generates discrepancies between current behavior and future targets, helping people access their own reasons for change. It also increases self-efficiency and avoids confrontation and resistance.

In the study, 53 smokers — each smoking more than 10 cigarettes a day for more than a year, and with no intention of abandoning the behavior — were engaged in a 20-minute motivational interview that sought to increase awareness of the potential problems caused, consequences experienced, and risks faced as a result of smoking.

Researchers from the universities of Granada in Spain and San Buenaventura in Bogotá, Colombia, compared the results of this style of interview with another type of standard intervention, and also with a control group.

They then watched whether the willingness to change increased in smokers. To this effect, they measured the amplitude of the shock reflex displayed by subjects when they were presented with a series of disagreeable images associated to tobacco.

Investigators discovered motivation interviewing was the most effect intervention. They determined this by observing that before the session, smokers responded to tobacco images in a similar fashion as they responded to pleasant images (for instance, erotic photographs).

However, after the intervention, their response to the same tobacco images was analogous to their response to disagreeable images, such as viewing corpses or images of violence.

“Motivational interviewing,” the researchers concluded, “manages to change, at least temporarily, the emotional response that smokers present before stimuli associated to tobacco, from pleasant to unpleasant, which helps them overcome one of the main obstacles for quitting tobacco consumption, i.e. motivation for change.”

According to the World Health Organization, over 1 billion people smoke worldwide, with tobacco consumption associated with three main causes of premature death.

Nevertheless, researchers note that there are several obstacles for health professionals when it comes to treating smokers. Smokers often show little motivation to change; health systems are often strapped for time and resources; and there is little evidence for the effectiveness of most psychotherapy techniques when it comes to smoking.

The new findings give hope as experts believe expanded use of motivational interviewing will help more people stop smoking.

Source: [University of Granada/EurekAlert!](#)

