

Going

# SMOKE-FREE

with **Yoga**  
by Dr. Kim Graham



I have been practicing Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in BC for 9 years, and teaching Yoga for 4. Although I work specifically in the field of addiction & mental illness, the topic of quitting smoking extends beyond the walls of the treatment centers I frequent.

I am often asked “What can you do to make me (or my friend, mom, dad, brother, etc) quit smoking?” First of all, nobody can do anything for you to make you quit smoking.

To be successful you need to work at it, to want it. You must be vigilant, and persevere: you need to be able to have love for yourself through all of it.

Smoking is a deadly addiction that needs to be taken seriously before quitting. For family members or friends, this can be a frustrating road to travel. The smoker may want to quit, but the thought of not smoking keeps them smoking, rather than facing the world without cigarettes - this is the ugly truth of addiction. For someone who has never faced this, it seems to be a no-brainer... why can't they just stop? The majority of smokers are seriously addicted.

Where to start? First, if you want to quit smoking, I recommend that you tell everyone of your plans to do so, making you accountable; in the addiction world, accountability is number one. This is especially important for 'closet' smokers - addiction loves secrets, so get rid of them.

Second, enlist the help of professionals. 'Quit-Now BC' has a great program offering counseling and phone support. Talk to your doctor about aids such as the patch. You have to let go of the ego that says you don't need any help, and insists you can do it alone.

So, where does Yoga fit into all of this? Pranayama. In TCM, the lung is responsible for feelings of grief and sadness and is involved in the process of letting go. It also plays a role in immunity and, is our connection to the qi (energy) we breathe to sustain life. Smoking disperses the lung qi

and can make you 'feel' better, especially when upset or stressed because during these times your qi is stagnating. Over the long term, a smoker disperses their qi so frequently that the lung loses its ability to do this on its own, resulting in symptoms such as breathlessness and cough (lung qi cannot descend as it is meant to).

Interestingly, smoking is usually the 'last' to go in any addictive process – I equate this with the TCM lung's link to letting go

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– when the lung qi is weak, our ability to let go will ultimately be diminished as well.

I educate my patients about the power of pranayama, especially those trying to quit smoking (regular acupuncture treatments are also recommended). Many of the Yogic pranayama practices focus on a deep inhale, a short hold of the breath, and a long exhale – similar to the action of inhaling the smoke of a cigarette.

I recommend replacing at least one regular cigarette/day with a pranayama practice. I ask them to simulate their individual smoking practice (how they inhale, exhale the smoke etc) - but to focus on really expanding the lungs and taking time to exhale. This also helps with the craving. The feedback I've received is that it is difficult at first (because all they are thinking about is not smoking). As they focus more on the breathing, they experience a tingling sensation by taking

in so much oxygen - and forget about the cigarette they are not smoking. As with all pranayama practices, if experiencing any dizziness etc, breathe normally and take some time to rest. I also recommend chest-opening asanas. Visualization exercises can also help. Drink lots of water, eat a variety of fresh food and fruits, and get plenty of vitamin C.

The colour of the lung is white in TCM theory, so as an added feature to the

pranayama practice, visualize breathing 'white' into the lungs.

Exhaling whatever colour you see in the lungs can also be of value.

The road to being smoke free

is challenging, but you can do it! Give yourself plenty of time to do it, and recognize that there are years of neurobiological connections that need to be undone. Don't expect to be smoke free in a week – or even 2 weeks. You need to find the combination that works. I wish you the best on your journey.

Namaste,  
Dr.Kim

