

Real Transwomen Quit

As a transwoman and a former smoker, I understand that motivation is the key to a successful attempt at quitting. I also know that none of the “standard” motivators worked for me.

“It’s bad for your health” simply doesn’t do it for me. I suspect the same is true for other transwomen. After all, most of us have already accepted that the potential dangers of hormone treatment, surgery and even living full-time are worth it. Each of these elements has risks and each “statistically” reduces our life span. Being a transwoman is, almost by definition, bad for your health.

“It makes you less physically fit”. That’s no good either. Newsflash: Transwomen have a tough enough time passing without packing on a ton of weight. We’re not looking to run marathons, we’re looking to pass and we need all the help we can get.

“Do it for your family’s sake”. I love my family, but I had to accept the risk that they might disown me when I came out. Every transwoman has faced this possibility if she has outed herself. Whatever the outcome, we’ve all made the decision that it is more important to live our lives honestly, than it is for our families to be comfortable.

I read all the pamphlets and none of them got me to change my point of view, so I thought I’d put together a list for myself that made sense for me as a transwoman. Here it is:

1. Smoking causes your skin to lose elasticity. Laugh-lines are one thing, but loose, inelastic skin is not just ugly... it’s a guy thing. If you want to pass (let alone be considered pretty) then tighter skin is a helpful.
2. Smoking changes the color of your skin. It robs it of its glow and gives it a yellowish, grayish tone. Of course, you can use foundation to try to cover the damage. But it isn’t as good as the real glow. That gray, sallow look may have looked good on Humphrey Bogart (a real man’s man who incidentally died of lung cancer) – but it looks lousy on a woman. No wonder transwomen who smoke do not pass as well.
3. Smoking also changes pore size. The connection is not direct; it has to do with elasticity and stress management too. But pore size is a really, really big deal when it comes to passing. Men have bigger pores than women do. Like so many gender cues, It’s mostly noticed at a subconscious level. However, if you smoke you get bigger pores – which can make you read as a male.
4. The other thing about bigger pores and less elasticity is an increased tendency for blackheads. Even if you are super hygienic, you’re still likely to get them. And, for smokers, they occur in two places that are the kiss of death to passing. Firstly, the area around the eyes and the upper cheek bone. This is a commonly seen in guys (whether they smoke or not). Eye make up

doesn't help, because the little bumps beneath concealer or eyeshadow are also telltale signs. It's a subtle point, but the eye area is a big deal when looking for gender cues. That's why mascara exists. The second areas that they occur are on the lower cheeks, jaw line and under the bottom lip. Whether you've had electrolysis or not. The last thing a transwomen needs are blackheads that look like beard stubble.

5. If you're on hormones, then you need to quit. Let the doctors talk about Deep Vein Thrombosis – I'm talking about looking better. For a number of reasons, hormones work better if you don't smoke. A big reason is that smoking removes vitamin C, which helps the body process estrogen. Eating 10 oranges a day might help in that department, but there are other drugs in cigarette smoke that interfere with hormone levels. Will quitting smoking give you bigger boobs? You know, they just might. But quitting smoking will help the hormones do their job.
6. On a related subject, cigarette smoking screws up fat distribution. I'm not talking about getting fat – I'm talking about how fat and muscle are distributed around the body. It's different for men and women. It's also an important gender cue. One of the positive effects of estrogen is that it redistributes stuff to the "woman places" – estrogen changes the shape of the face, hips, boobs, etc. Smoking interferes with this process too.
7. And by the way, what do you think boobs are made of anyway? There's no guarantee you'll put on weight, but so what? If quitting smoking makes you put on a few pounds of fat it's more likely to go to the good places. If it's on the boobs and hips... that's a good thing.
8. Have you noticed that smokers have deeper more masculine voices? There's a bunch of reasons why that happens. Here's the first. Smoking loosens the vocal chords. This has the effect of lowering the frequency. Quitting smoking will raise the pitch of your voice – period. And by the way, if you are in voice training, quitting smoking is a great way of explaining to your friends why your voice has suddenly changed.
9. Smoking also changes the textural characteristics of the voice. Consider Mel Torme or Sinatra. They have a smooth, manly texture that comes in part from how smoking affects the various mucus membranes (wet bits) in the vocal system.
10. Resonance is also changed by smoking. The connection is complicated and involves the throat, chest, breathing and the vocal chords. But the deal is this – One of the biggest, gender give-aways is resonance. It has to do with where the secondary pitches (the voice behind the voice) are. That's why Bea Arthur and Cher still sound female. Smoking changes that resonance... and makes you sound like a guy.
11. Smoking makes you smell like a guy. It's not just about stinking of smoke – which is nasty, but gender neutral. The body has to get rid of cigarette poisons somehow. And some of it comes out on your skin. Regardless of perfume, women put out different smells (pheromones) than men. This system of making smells (and coincidentally the way your body tastes) is hormone driven. Cigarettes not only interfere with those womanly hormones,

- the poisons on your skin wipes out any positive effects that manage to make it through. So there's the connection - If you smoke – you smell like a guy.
12. It stains teeth, clothes, fingers, nails, etc. – All manly things that interfere with your womanhood. Admittedly, you can battle against these effects – but the only way of winning the war is to quit.
 13. It makes your breath stink.
 14. It's not feminine. It's true that Susan Hayward and Betty Grable (smokers who died at a relatively young age of lung cancer) were the rare type who could pull it off in their era. But today's smart, attractive, desirable woman does not smoke. Whether you use an old-fashioned way of looking at femininity, or a more modern one. Feminine women do not smoke.
 15. Neither do butch, athletic women.
 16. You know that smoking is a waste of money. But what are you going to spend it on? Grooming – Because one of the biggest differences between men and women is the level of maintenance.
 17. If you quit for one day only... That's the cost of having your eyebrows waxed... essential for the well-groomed woman.
 18. If you quit for two days... That's the cost of a manicure.
 19. If you quit for a week. That's a hairdo (and possibly coloring)
 20. If you quit for a month – That's a really decent outfit with some minor custom tailoring.
 21. And if you quit for 2 years that pays for a boob job.
 22. Quit longer than that and you've got liposuction, botox, SRS... you name it covered.
 23. You'll feel sexier. Obviously, you'll be sexier because of all the physical benefits. But you'll feel sexier, because cigarettes chemically interfere with your libido
 24. You'll live longer as a woman. Many transwomen, myself included, didn't find the courage to face their gender until later in life. Now that I'm free to live as I truly am, wouldn't it be nice to enjoy it some more?
 25. Quitting smoking, like transitioning is about taking control of your life.

That's all I can think of for now, but it strikes me that these (unlike the usual stuff) are compelling reasons for a transwoman to quit. Sure, there are all the other reasons – but for me, they seem abstract and are secondary to the real deal. This is the real deal. Never mind the statistics about lung cancer - smoking seriously interferes with your transition.

If you are really committed to living your life as a transwoman, then prove it. Quit smoking.

Nichola Ward, August 28, 2003