

Beeld; 26 May 2009 (English translation)

‘Box’ just might be nicotine’s killer, Say farewell to cigarettes

A new machine that helps relieve the withdrawal symptoms of addicts is being tested. Sonja van Buul experienced it in person.

I am fed up. I’m a cigarette smoker and I’ve decided to quit smoking, right now whilst testing a new “wonder machine”. Because I know how bad smoking is for both my health and the health of others, and ten other reasons... All smokers know the stories; I’m smoking like a chimney, but at least I’m not doing Heroin, Cocaine, LSD or Marijuana like Tom, Dick or Harry. Yet I am not one of those smokers that on any given day decides “that was it”, the last drag of a cigarette, and throw away the bud with the intention of never looking back. Believe me, I’ve tried it before, with the help of bubblegum, a nicotine patch or ten, Zyban, combination therapy, a “Hallo, my name is Sonja and I am a smoker”-program, and by my own strength. My palms were sweaty and my heart was burdened as I drove on the dirt road leading to the rehabilitation center called “Jedidja Center of Hope”, just outside Vanderbijlpark. I was motivating myself; “you’re just shaking an irritating habit”. I was underestimating my nicotine addiction that according to professionals is just as bad an addiction as alcohol or cocaine. A machine that will assist in reducing the withdrawal symptoms and the craving for cigarettes is the last resort that me and four other addicts can and will grab hold of.

Rubbish, fiction or fact?

Could it be true that the NET-device, that’s been dubbed “The Box”, just might be the solution for millions of addicts worldwide? We don’t know, but we are testing the wonder for the first time in South Africa. The device is set according to each individual’s addiction and then connected. Twenty minutes after your last cigarette your pulse apparently starts beating normal and your blood pressure stabilizes. Rubbish! Twenty minutes after the electrodes have been stuck behind our ears and the NET-device switched on, I am ready to make any promise for another cigarette and my blood pressure is dangerously high. Hennie, a Heroin and Cocaine addict quickly falls asleep on a rest bench and later explains that it is the first time he’s slept during withdrawals. “Believe me, whilst you withdraw you cant sleep and you are constantly making planes for your next fix” says Hennie. The other three addicts, J.J, Willie and Maarten, are sitting peacefully next to me on the “druggy – bench” and don’t look like they’re withdrawing from drugs, all whilst I keep on wiggling around.

Might be a miracle?

I realized the next morning that NET’s own Joe Winston from the USA and Lorne Patterson from Scotland hadn’t promised a miracle. “The electric stimulation reduces the acute and chronic symptoms of drug induced withdrawals and prevents a relapse,” Winston had explained the previous evening. Suddenly I realized that I hadn’t, according to my old habit. reached for the half empty packet of Kent Special Cigarettes on my bedside table as soon as I opened my eyes for the first drag of a cigarette that has been a morning necessity for the last 25 years. “Maybe a miracle

after all” I thought to myself. I test Willie (26) on how he is feeling and his answer amazes me. “By this time I would have experienced terrible withdrawal symptoms and would have made a plan to run away long time ago”. “Did you see the American, Joe’s, Blackberry? In the olden days I would have stolen it a long time ago to exchange for drugs”. J.J. (19) explains that he got addicted to drugs “to be cool”. “Soon I had to smoke Marijuana every morning or else my hand palms would start sweating. Later I went on to use Cocaine-rocks and Heroin.” Maarten (25) has been a drug addict for the past 13 years. He has used a variety of drugs and sees the machine as a means to live a normal life.

Wonder box alone doesn’t work

Drug addicts stay connected to the box for six days, this whilst smokers are ready to tackle life without their nicotine crutch within three days. The NET-device alone is not a long-term solution. After the initial treatment, group therapy pays attention to aspects like behavior changes, future plans, the emotional and psychological aspects of addiction. The process lasts for 21 days after withdrawals. I and the others have been clean for three weeks and four days. Not one of us five has relapsed after the treatment. I will spend my time watching my eating and drinking habits because my emotional tie with cigarettes, and not the withdrawals, is now my biggest problem. It also doesn’t help that I substitute cigarettes with suckers and brandy. I know the box could cure me from alcoholism, but suckers causes extra fat and I can only get rid of that with exercise and sweat. And that sounds like extremely hard work!

What is the NET-machine?

The NET-machine is a tool that uses light electronic stimulation to reduce and prevent the acute and chronic symptoms of drug induced withdrawal symptoms. The electronic stimulation is imparted over a period of three to six days depending on the type of addiction; this is done with the help of electrodes being deposited behind both ears. This wonder-box, as some are calling it, repairs the biochemical balance in the brain to what it was before the addict started using drugs, alcohol or nicotine.

Where does it come from?

Dr. Margaret A. Patterson, once a surgeon at the Tung Wah hospital in Hong Kong, had in 1972 explored the possibility of using electro-acupuncture as a method of pain control after an operation. She accidentally discovered that the therapy also reduces opium withdrawals and returned to England to investigate the technique clinically and scientifically. Convinced of the technique’s medical and social possibilities, she developed NeuroElectric Therapy (NET). NET is a Neuro-electrical technique that, without the use of medicine or acupuncture, reduces the withdrawal symptoms of drugs. Her son, Lorne, a psychiatric nurse, other family members and interested parties started developing NET for commercial use in 2002 after the death of Dr. Patterson and hope to shortly heal addicts worldwide.

Enquiries

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