

Jorge: Determined to stop smoking

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"In 2000 I was in Arq (a nightclub in Sydney) dancing, it was Australia Day, and I was smoking a cigarette at five in the morning and I said 'no more'."

Jorge has overcome a lot to become as healthy and happy as he is today. He was diagnosed with HIV in his native Columbia where 'you can't talk about it, you feel like a criminal, like you've done something wrong to the society and you have to pay for it.'

'There's a lot of taboo, a lot of discrimination about people with HIV; a lot of stigma. They don't talk about HIV, they talk about AIDS. So a person with HIV, is not "HIV positive", all of them are "AIDS people". I was unable to talk to anyone about it.'

Jorge came to Australia confused about what it meant to have HIV. His English was poor and Australian culture was different. Luckily he found a service with a Spanish interpreter.

'I had an Australian partner who was HIV positive and he took me to the hospital and they offered me medication. I met people from the Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service. I had support from them and learned a lot about HIV.'

No longer isolated 'I found other HIV people, we were in working groups, we were chatting together. I had a carer who was giving me emotional support.'

Jorge has remained involved with the Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service and he now contributes. 'They offered me a course, so I became a worker. Since last April I've been working with the Spanish speaking community.'

Now he is a peer support worker for others with HIV and does community work. He is proud of this, but it isn't easy.

'A lot of people don't know how to use the services. For most of the community there is a lot of taboo about HIV, they don't want to hear about it. We try to reach them but it's hard because it's a very difficult topic to talk about.'

Meanwhile, Jorge was a heavy smoker of Marlboro Reds. 'In 2000 I was in Arq [a nightclub in Sydney] dancing, it was Australia Day, and I was smoking a cigarette at five in the morning and I said "no more".'

Quitting smoking was difficult but Jorge was determined. He reflected on his past, 'I had to pass through very difficult moments to be able to cope with the society, with the culture, with the language, so I said to myself, if I can cope with all this and I want to be here and I want to improve my lifestyle, I have to make changes.'

He hasn't smoked since. For Jorge, smoking and socialising had always gone hand-in-hand, but he still wanted to socialise, so he worked hard at finding a balance so that his social life didn't suffer. 'I stopped at 5 in the morning and that night I went out and I had beers and, you know, when you drink you want to smoke. But I didn't.'

Dr Caroline Warne is a Sydney HIV specialist GP who has focused on working with people to support changes towards healthier lifestyles, and disease prevention. She has noticed a change among people with HIV when it comes to talking about smoking. 'People will often come and say "look this is always the way I've been, I've always smoked heavily when I've gone out to dance clubs and parties and when I've used alcohol or other recreational drugs, but I no longer feel that it's okay. This is becoming an increasingly anti-social activity and I'm feeling peer pressure". Peer pressure is encouraging some people to quit now.'

'There can be lots things that will trigger people to smoke. Going to bars. Using recreational drugs. Having friends that smoke. But I like to think that this is changing, that the culture is changing.'

When asked about how he found the strength to make this life change, Jorge talks like others who've made similar

shifts. He describes learning to accept things about himself, facing personal issues, learning better ways to cope with his problems, worries and anxiety.

'I was upset all the time. The way I was sometimes treating my friends was not good. I realised I had to make changes to live better. I was very upset with society, a lot of things happened to me. I learned to let it go and to heal and to get better.'

He used meditation and personal growth tapes and found the answers within himself. 'I've been making lots of changes to be more understanding with people. I try to not gossip about people's lives or behaviours. I try to respect everybody's behaviour. To improve life every day, and try to be more honest.'

Exercise is important. He visits the gym early mornings, runs on the beach and works as a landscape gardener. He eats lots of fresh fruit and salads and avoids 'bad' fats and oils. Jorge believes in the wisdom of 'healthy body, healthy mind'.

When asked about his most precious times, Jorge speaks of his love for gardens and what happens when he is in them. 'For me, a garden is a place for contemplation, meditation, to be calm. When I get in touch with the garden I forget about the rest of life, about things happening around me.'

Jorge is in great health and other parts of his life are also going well. 'I feel so proud of myself. I came to a new culture with no money, no family, and over six years I have learned a lot. I have my landscape gardening diploma, I'm working for the government, I've got my car, I run my business. I think I am doing very well. I'm going to do much better.'

Some people see HIV as having been an important catalyst to make changes in their lives. For Jorge this experience was life-changing. 'Here I've learned to live with HIV, I've learned to have a better future for me and I learned to be happy. I realise HIV is a great thing that happened to me because I've learned to improve my lifestyle, to be happy and be able to move on.'

Managing HIV. It's about [balance](#) [1].

Getting help to stop smoking

Most people can't just stop smoking as abruptly as Jorge. Different strategies work for different people. For most people, developing a plan for how to quit will improve the chance of success, and help deal with difficulties while quitting.

Your doctor can give advice and support, explain nicotine replacement therapy and other medical options.

Quit organisations in your state or territory have loads of resources available to help you when preparing to quit and can provide support during quitting. Find out more about ways to quit at www.quit.org.au [2] or call the National Quitline on 131 848 or talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Some [PLWHA](#) [3] Person (or People) Living with HIV/AIDS. organisations and AIDS Councils have specific programs, including quitting workshops and one to one support.

- [living with HIV](#)
- [Culturally and linguistically diverse communities](#)
- [exercise](#)
- [personal stories](#)
- [smoking](#)

Links:

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/hivbalance>

[2] <http://www.quit.org.au>

[3] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/119>