



BREATHING ON YOUR OWN

Tips for Breaking That Nasal Spray Addiction

MAYBE IT STARTS with a cold, allergies, hay fever—at any rate, you’re stuffy and congested, and maybe all night you snuffle and snort and toss and turn and bounce off the bed to pace, hoping that gravity will clear your sinuses. Let’s say that you’re twenty years old, newly married, though probably it’s just a coincidence that your inability to breathe kicked in right after the wedding.

Maybe your new husband, the son of a pharmacist, compares your nighttime breathing patterns to the rumble of a Mack truck (affectionately, of course). And maybe

he offers you a topical nasal decongestant and says, “Try this.” Maybe you’re dubious, but he assures you that he has it on his dad’s good authority that you should ignore the warnings on the container, the ones that caution you not to use it for more than three days.

So now, you’re twenty years old and you’re hooked. Say that not too long ago you were a girl who went to church every Sunday and never swore, a girl whose biggest rebellion was memorizing the *Jesus Christ Superstar* soundtrack after your youth minister warned you away from it. And now the beginning of your marriage has handed you disillusionment after disillusionment. Your husband mocks religion and drinks beer at lunch and never has time for a real conversation.

And now you’re an addict. You don’t even drink and you’ve never smoked. You’ve always been an advocate of natural highs, the kind you get from stroking a purring cat or watching snow fall or listening to music or reading a great poem, but now here you are, dependent on a little plastic bottle, unable to breathe without it. You always thought that addiction required a high, but now you know that sometimes all it takes is the blessed absence of pain or struggle. And it’s such a relief to sleep deeply through the night. It’s such a relief not to flip from side to side or start awake, face to face with your regrets.

With proper rest, you feel less despair about this whole mess you’ve gotten yourself into, this short-term cure, this escape that might be a bigger trap after all—the marriage, not the nasal spray. Maybe you entered this marriage with deliberate recklessness, sad and lost and scared of your bleak, blank future when the boy you’d grown up with and loved for six years broke up with you abruptly and eventually moved away, disappeared. Maybe

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you'd foolishly believed that marriage would provide a refuge from your anxiety, that somehow it would allow you to breathe again. But no. Here you are, and every time you inhale a squirt of medicine and feel a rush of fresh air through your open passages, you know that you're just delaying the inevitable, that time is closing in on you. At first you just need it once a day, but soon it's twice, three times. The spray temporarily shrinks your swelled blood vessels, but then causes them to swell up twice as big the next time. You push down panic but still it's like you're inhaling and exhaling to the same refrain: What will you do? What will you do? What are you going to do?

What follow are some guidelines for breaking that addiction gradually but effectively.