

Broken Bow: (308) 872-8327 Grand Island: (308) 767-2695 Lincoln: (308) 767-2061
Kearney: (308) 767-2650 North Platte: (308) 221-6204 Omaha: (402) 401-2864 November 2021

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How COVID-19 Worsened America's Opioid Crisis

Lockdowns Made Things Tough

Since the mid-1990s, over 500,000 deaths have been attributed to opioids. Many factors fueled the problem: corporate greed, economic recession, and changing attitudes toward pain treatments. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic, which escalated the opioid crisis to untold levels.

Data released by the National Center for Health Statistics on July 14 show a large increase in overdose deaths. Between December 2019 and December 2020, more than 93,000 Americans died from drug overdoses. That's nearly 29.4% higher than the previous 12 months. This means that, on average, 255 Americans were dying from overdoses every day.

One of the most notable things about the opioid crisis during the pandemic is the increase in death by overdose throughout the country. States like West Virginia have always been at the center of the crisis, but states like California, Arizona, and Colorado have seen shocking increases in overdoses. Opioid-related deaths



have gone up for men and women of every race and age, and the numbers aren't slowing down.

The question still lingers — why have opioid deaths increased during the pandemic? The first reason focuses on the lockdowns. Many people were furloughed or completely cut off from work. This led to isolation, which is unhealthy for most people. For those already using opioids, they had more free time to use and their habits only grew worse.

Then, hospitals became overloaded during the pandemic. Those already recovering from addiction found it more difficult to get medical treatment when the pandemic started. Most medical attention focused on COVID-19 patients, and many former opioid users fell to the wayside. The impact was even worse if they had lost their job — which led some people to return to old habits.

As the pandemic continues to rage on, the opioid crisis has not waned. It could take years for opioid use to level out. And that assumes it won't continue to increase.

39 Years Ago, I Was a Smoker

The Addiction Battle Is Never-Ending But Worth It

Hello, friends! I hope you're all doing well. Lately, I've thought about something a little amusing. Because I have an allergic reaction to tobacco smoke these days, it usually surprises people when I tell them that, 39 years ago, I was an avid smoker myself.

We've all heard "smoking kills," and there are many stories about people quitting for themselves and those around them. But the truth is that I didn't think about my family, friends, or even my health when I quit. Both my wife and I smoked, and all our friends smoked. It seemed to me that everyone picks their poison in life, and smoking was mine. Smoking was ingrained in my lifestyle as a relaxing thing I'd do after dinner or a long day at work.

Thirty-nine years ago, I was a law student. During law school, a typical exam could last 2–3 hours. You might've read past newsletters where I talked about my struggle with school as an older student, and because I'd take smoke breaks in the middle of exams (because you could do so — there were ash trays in the hallway), I was losing 10 minutes every hour just to smoke.

Studying was already a lot of work, and my wife and I had sold off a lot of property assets just to make my law school dream a reality. Although cigarette packs were only 50 cents in my day, I decided that I couldn't afford to keep smoking. Losing at least 20 minutes per exam was just too high of a risk for my grades.

This was still before nicotine patches or medication were widely available, so I told my wife, "I'm going to create brand-new habits." I stayed up later at night to watch TV so I could take my mind off smoking before going to bed and started taking walks and reading more often. After 30 days, it got easier and easier.

I know that even to this day, if I smoked 1–3 cigarettes, I'd be back to exactly where I was 39 years ago. Smoking is very addictive, and I don't think I would've been able to quit if I weren't so invested in law school. When it came to graduating, I just knew I had to do anything it took.

Of course, quitting smoking did absolute wonders for my health. It was so much easier to breathe, sleep, work, and live without



succumbing to colds easily. Today, my body has mostly healed from those years of smoking.

With Nov. 7 being National Cancer Awareness Day, I also can't fail to mention that — while I still have a higher risk of lung cancer than people who have never smoked — my cancer risk is much lower today than it would've been if I kept smoking. My strange development of an allergy toward cigarette smoke also helps discourage me from being in proximity to it!

Smokers will hear all kinds of stories and reasons for quitting; I know I did. But if you're a smoker and you're considering quitting, I just want to say that you don't have to wait until a dramatic "rock bottom," which may never come. Sometimes it's best to raise the stakes yourself by pursuing what you really want and refusing to let smoking get in the way of it. It might seem difficult to find new habits that can disrupt your previous smoking habits, but trust me, it will get easier, even if it's always a fight.

- Bill Steffens

Overcoming the Impossible Task

Improving Your Mental Health One Step at a Time

Almost everyone at some point has encountered a task that is seemingly simple, but no matter what they do, they can't complete it. These tasks can be as straightforward as making the bed or something bigger, like cleaning an entire room. For many, this is an obstacle that they may want to do but can't, which weighs heavily on them and becomes detrimental to their mental health.

It's important to understand that the impossible task is not a sign of laziness; depression and anxiety can make any task feel much bigger and more difficult than it actually is. If you find yourself unable to do the things you need or want to do, try these techniques to help overcome your obstacles.

Break up the task.

When the overarching task feels daunting, breaking it up into smaller segments can help you manage it. If you're cleaning the kitchen, clean for only a few minutes at a time before taking a break. It might take longer, but the space will be clean at the end of the day.

Make the task more enjoyable.

Play music or involve your pet in some way to make the task fun or create a reward system for yourself. For example, tidying a specific

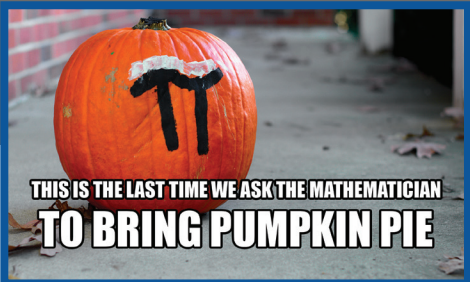


area of the house or folding a basket of laundry may earn you time to play video games or watch TV. Alternating tasks and rewards is a great way to overcome any task, big or small.

It can help to consider why the task feels so impossible, especially if you used to enjoy it. Try to remember what made it enjoyable and see if you can return to that state of mind. If the objective is not so urgent, determine its importance and if the task can be saved for another day.

When all else fails, you can always ask someone for support or even pay someone else to do the task for you. No matter what you decide, there are ways to defeat the impossible task.

TAKE A *BREAK*



CAN YOU LEGALLY MOVE A STATE'S BORDER?

THESE OREGON COUNTIES HOPE SO

Earlier this year, several counties in Eastern Oregon voted to break away from the Beaver State and join their next-door neighbor, Idaho.

Led by a grassroots organization called Citizens for Greater Idaho (or Greater Idaho, for short), this push to move the Oregon-Idaho border further west was fueled by an urban/rural and liberal/conservative divide within the state. In short, rural Oregonians, who are mostly conservative, don't feel like their state government, which leans liberal, represents their interests. However, rather than leave their homes and livelihoods behind for a government that better represents their values, they've decided they want to bring Idaho's values and government to them.

While the social and political dimensions of this movement are fascinating, the more pragmatic question of whether moving a state border is possible at all is an essential element to explore. What do legal experts say about the possibility of moving Oregon's state border? Well, proponents of the move shouldn't hold their breath.

While some counties have "voted" to leave Oregon, those votes don't hold any legal power. They're more like a poll, gauging interest in an idea before further action is taken. To make Greater Idaho a reality, however, both state legislatures and the United States Congress will have to approve the move. Idaho's state border is enshrined in its constitution, which means that in order for the borders to change, so would the state's founding document.

It's a tall bar to clear, but state borders have moved before. In 1998, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that much of Ellis Island actually belonged to New Jersey rather than New York. The mere legal possibility, plus the affirmation of some representatives in the Idaho state government, including Governor Brad Little, is enough for Greater Idaho to continue hoping that they'll have a say in the kind of government they want to have.



EASY PUMPKIN BROWNIES

Inspired by TheCookieRookie.com

If you have a hard time choosing between chocolate cake and pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving, this 2-for-1 treat will knock your socks off.

Ingredients

- 1 box brownie mix, plus other ingredients listed on box
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips
- 1/2 can pumpkin purée
- 6 oz cream cheese, softened
- 3 tbsp sugar
- 1 tbsp pumpkin pie spice

Directions

1. Preheat the oven as directed on the brownie box, then make the brownie mix. Fold in chocolate chips.
2. In a medium bowl, combine pumpkin purée, cream cheese, sugar, and pumpkin pie spice.
3. Choose your pan as directed on the brownie box. Grease it if needed.
4. Pour half of the brownie mix into the pan and spread evenly.
5. Add the pumpkin mixture to the pan, evenly or in a pattern. Cover with the rest of the brownie mix and spread evenly.
6. Bake as directed on the brownie box, adding 10 minutes to account for the pumpkin. Test for doneness, and when your toothpick comes out clean, cool and enjoy!

Thanksgiving Dinner for All

How to Cook for Diabetics and Vegans on Turkey Day

Alongside family and football, food is often the highlight of Thanksgiving. But if you're cooking dinner for a large group, crafting the perfect menu can be difficult. Veganism and vegetarianism are more popular than ever, and it can be frustrating finding dishes that everyone can enjoy — or even eat at all, in the case of a diabetic friend or family member. Luckily, there are plenty of options to create an amazing meal for any group of diverse diners.

Diabetics

Thanksgiving is a stressful time for anyone who monitors their blood sugar. Sweet potato casserole and sugar-packed pies can tempt even the most diet-conscious diabetic. But undereating can be as unhealthy

for diabetics as overeating, so it's important to include appetizers in your Thanksgiving menu. Healthy options include raw vegetables and hummus, roasted nuts, shrimp cocktail, or a cheeseboard.

For the main meal, turkey is fine if you hold off on any brown sugar or honey glaze. Green bean casserole is safe as well, and stuffing can be included as long as you use whole-grain bread. For dessert, parfaits made with Greek yogurt, fresh fruit, and sliced almonds are healthy and tasty and can round out the perfect meal.

Vegans

The best thing about cooking Thanksgiving for a vegan is that there are plenty of substitutes for classic dishes. Vegan turkeys are available at most grocery stores. It may not look like your traditional turkey since there are no bones, but it still cooks and tastes like a turkey. If a vegan turkey is out of the question, you can try making a mushroom Wellington or roasted cauliflower as a replacement.

For side dishes, vegan macaroni and cheese and roasted Brussels sprouts are easy and safe. As for dessert, most grocery stores carry a variety of gluten-free and vegan desserts at their bakery, such as nondairy ice cream and flourless cookies, that taste similar or identical to their gluten-filled, non-vegan counterparts.

The holidays are a great time to come together, and with these options, you can make everyone feel included in the celebration.

