

## LASER THERAPY

A towering man in black scrubs greets me as I walk into the strip-mall office of Laser Concepts. "Are you ready to quit smoking?" Keith Sailsbery asks enthusiastically, before leading me back to a small, dim room with Picasso prints on the walls and soft music playing. I sit in a cushy recliner, and he hands me a pair of tinted glasses, and prepares me for the laser "therapy." (They're not allowed to call it acupuncture, though that's essentially the theory behind it. And they're not FDA approved.) It's supposed to help me stop smoking—a somewhat closeted habit that I've had for the last 10 years, quitting for a few months here and a couple of years there.

Sailsbery warns me that there's certain information they can't share with me because it's proprietary. It's a competitive business, he explains, and because of the success rate at Laser Concepts (around 75 percent), they say that area rivals have been sending spies in to see exactly what they're doing. I hand him my business card to quell any suspicion that I may be one of those spies, and he gratefully accepts.

Sailsbery explains that the therapy he's going to use will suppress my appetite, so that I'm not trying to stuff my mouth all the time to make up for not smoking. He says it's also going to stimulate endorphins in the same places that cigarettes will, so that the physical cravings and dependency won't be an issue. Of course, the habit and mental addiction are my own demons to battle.

"We hit several pressure points around the body. There's little bundles of nerves at the pressure points. This light goes in and it stimulates these nerve endings, which in turn produce endorphins. So basically what we do is we trick your body into thinking you've had a cigarette long enough for you to get all the chemicals, the nicotine and all the other poisons out of your system. Normally that takes 72 hours."

He's a fast talker who's quick with a joke, and shares his story about quitting smok-

ing (he smoked for 25 years, and at the end was up to almost three packs a day). Though I've never been to a 12-step meeting, I get the idea this is what it would feel like. Story-sharing to let you know that you're not a bad person, with an emphasis on the evils of the offending substance.

"We would much rather have you here than out buying cigarettes at 7-Eleven or smoking or whatever. We want to help you quit smoking. That's our goal."

He goes through the thousands of chemicals that are in cigarettes, and talks about the tiring detox feeling that accompanies quitting, and tells me that for the next 72 hours I should stay away from caffeine and alcohol, drink lots of water and take a daily multivitamin. Then we begin.

Sailsbery swabs the pen-sized laser with a disinfectant and presses it to different points along my arm, my face, legs and spends a lot of time in my ear. He chats with me for a while about his life, about his former job as a warehouse manager, about current events and smoking and quitting, and then quiets down so I can relax under the laser's beam. The session lasts close to an hour, and aside from a few moments of warmth within the ear, there's no physical sensation. He shows me a place on my hand to rub if I'm feeling stressed, which will help ward off the evil cravings.

When it's over, the glasses come off, the laser goes away and Sailsbery brings me a bottle of Laser Concepts labeled water and encourages me to take a cinnamon candy. As I leave, I tell them the story will be in the June

issue of the magazine, and he and his partner both shake their heads. They're less interested in the press than in my recovering, they say, in ridding myself of the demon. They know I have a long road ahead of me.

But the road seems shorter than it has in the past. Four days later, at the point in quitting when I'm usually at my worst, I'm doing fine. Even when I go to a party on night three and have a couple of drinks (against my instructions), I hold strong. My mouth would love to have one, and my lungs are begging to be filled with toxins, but gone is the moodiness and anxiety that I usually battle when I try to drop the habit.

When sharing the stories of the week with friends, we discuss the placebo effect, and my easy ability to be influenced and convinced of things going on within my body. Is that what happened with any and all of the above therapies? There are skeptics out there who will tell you yes. I'm more inclined to think the opposite.

But there are a number of forces at work. All of the sessions I attended were a kind of therapy, when you spend an hour or so speaking with a professional about you. It's a time to reflect and empower yourself, and a time to focus on what your body's doing and what it should be doing. Whatever way the treatments worked, whether my brain's really gotten my liver in line, and my qi has been unclogged, the end result speaks for itself. I wouldn't necessarily question how a traditional medication worked if it made me feel better. Why should this be any different?

*Laser Concepts charges \$299. Call 868-7867.*

