

Smoking: How to Quit



People who smoke crave the nicotine in cigarettes. To give up smoking, your body has to stop craving the nicotine. It is hard to quit, but most people can do it. Keep in mind the benefits of quitting smoking:

- Smoking raises your risk of heart attack. Quitting reverses this risk.
- You greatly lower your risk of many types of cancer.
- You will have more energy and less shortness of breath. And you will cough less.
- Quitting smoking may be the most important thing you can do for your health, and you may save money.

How can you quit smoking?

Using treatment can double or triple your chances of quitting. Tools you can use include:

- Medicines that reduce your craving and withdrawal symptoms.
- Support groups. Check with the American Lung Association (www.lungusa.org) or your local hospital.
- Counseling from doctors, pharmacists, dentists, therapists, or nurses.

- A stop-smoking hotline such as 1-800-QUITNOW (1-800-784-8669).
- Internet programs, chat rooms, and smartphone or tablet apps to help you quit.

How do you make a plan to quit?

1. Get ready.

- Choose a quit date that works for you. Do not try to quit during high-stress times.
- Get rid of your cigarettes, ashtrays, and lighters. Clean your house and clothes to get rid of the smoke smell.
- If you live with someone who smokes, discuss quitting together. If this is not an option, talk to the person(s) about not smoking around you. When you can, avoid places where others are smoking.

2. Make a plan for quitting.

- Decide what times are the hardest for you, such as when you are restless or around others who smoke. Plan how you will handle your cravings during these times.
- Change your routine. Avoid those things that make you reach for a cigarette.
- Find ways to cope. For example, take a walk after dinner instead of having a cigarette.
- Find ways to cut down on stress in the first few weeks of quitting.

3. Get support.

- Ask loved ones or people who used to smoke for support and tips.
- Get counseling. People who use phone, internet, group, or one-on-one counseling are much more likely to stop smoking.
- Join a support group for people who smoke. Find an Internet chat room for 24-hour support.

4. Use medicine.

Medicines reduce your craving and withdrawal symptoms. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the options.

The first-choice medicines are:

- Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). You can buy nicotine gum, patches, and lozenges without a prescription. If you are pregnant, check with your doctor first.
- Bupropion and varenicline. These prescription medicines have no nicotine.

5. Be prepared for relapse.

A slip is when you have one or two cigarettes after you quit. If you return to regular smoking, it is called a relapse. To avoid either one:

- Get support from your doctor, family, friends, and support group.
- Learn to recognize when you might slip. Plan ahead to cope with those situations.
- Reward yourself. Quitting smoking is tough, and each small success deserves credit.
- Do not smoke at all. Not even a puff!

If you do slip or relapse, don't give up. Revise your quit plan and get back to not smoking as soon as possible. Talk to someone who has quit smoking, or to a counselor, to get ideas of what to do.

What about withdrawal?

Nicotine withdrawal can make you feel grumpy, restless, nervous, or hungry, among other things. Withdrawal symptoms are at their worst in the first 2 to 3 weeks after you quit, although they can last longer. This is a lot to deal with, but keep at it. You will feel better.

You can deal with withdrawal symptoms by using medicines and doing more physical activity. Decreasing the number of demands on you every day also may help. Remind yourself often that your symptoms will get better.

How can you avoid weight gain?

Many people gain weight when they quit smoking. Don't try to avoid this by going on a strict diet at the same time that you try to quit. This will make it even harder to stop smoking. To lower your chance of gaining weight:

- Get plenty of exercise.
- Do not use food to replace cigarettes. Instead of eating candy, chew sugarless gum.

What if you go back to smoking?

Relapse is common. Most people who smoke quit and restart many times before they stop for good. The important thing is to keep trying. Each time you relapse, think about why you went back to smoking. If you slip while you are using quit smoking medicine, keep using the medicine unless you go back to regular smoking.

How can your medical staff help?

Health professionals can be great resources. Your doctor can:

- Tailor an approach to quitting that suits you.
- Prescribe medicines to help you succeed.
- Refer you to a "quit smoking" program or support group.
- Teach you healthy eating and exercise habits.
- Help you track the benefits to your health.