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Smoking: Steps to Help You Break the Habit

Why does it seem so hard to stop smoking?

Smoking causes changes in your body and in the way you act. The changes in your body are caused by an addiction to nicotine. The changes in the way you act developed over time as you bought cigarettes, lit them and smoked them. These changes have become your smoking habit.

When you have a smoking habit, many things seem to go along with having a cigarette. These might include having a cup of coffee or an alcoholic drink, being stressed or worried, talking on the phone, driving, socializing with friends or wanting something to do with your hands.

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How can I stop smoking?

You'll have the best chance of stopping if you do the following:

- Get ready.
- Get support and encouragement.
- Learn how to handle stress and the urge to smoke.
- Get medication and use it correctly.
- Be prepared for relapse.
- Keep trying.

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How should I get ready to stop smoking?

Set a stop date 2 to 4 weeks from now so you'll have time to get ready. Write down your personal reasons for stopping. Be specific. Keep your list with you so you can look at it when you feel the urge to smoke.

To help you understand your smoking habit, keep a diary of when and why you smoke. Using information from this diary, you and your doctor can make a plan to deal with the things that make you want to smoke.

Just before your stop date, get rid of all of your cigarettes, matches, lighters and ashtrays.

The following guide lists the steps you need to take before, during and after your quit date: [Stop Smoking Guide](#) (1-page PDF file. [About PDFs](#)).

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Immediate reasons to stop

- Bad breath and stained teeth
- Bad smell in clothes and hair and on skin
- Lower athletic ability
- Cough and sore throat
- Faster heartbeat and raised blood pressure
- Risk of second-hand smoke to people around you
- Cost of smoking

Long-term reasons to stop

- Toxic chemicals in cigarette smoke
- Risk of lung cancer and many other types of cancer
- Risk of heart disease
- Serious breathing problems
- Time lost working or having fun because you're sick
- Wrinkles
- Risk of stomach ulcers and acid reflux
- Risk of gum disease
- Risk of damage to babies of pregnant women who smoke
- Setting a bad example for your children

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How can I get support and encouragement?

Tell your family and friends what kind of help you need. Their support will make it easier for you to stop smoking. Also, ask your family doctor to help you develop a plan for stopping smoking. He or she can give you information on telephone hotlines, such as 1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669), or self-help materials that can be very helpful. Your doctor can also recommend a stop-smoking program. These programs are often held at local hospitals or health centers.

Give yourself rewards for stopping smoking. For example, with the money you save by not smoking, buy yourself something special.

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What about stress and my urges to smoke?

You may have a habit of using cigarettes to relax during stressful times. Luckily, there are good ways to manage stress without smoking. Relax by taking a hot bath, going for a walk, or breathing slowly and deeply. Think of changes in your daily routine that will help you resist the urge to smoke. For example, if you used to smoke when you drank coffee, drink hot tea instead.

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What will happen when I stop smoking?

How you feel when you stop depends on how much you smoked, how addicted your body is to nicotine and how well you get ready to stop smoking. You may crave a cigarette or feel hungrier than usual. You may feel edgy and have trouble concentrating. You also may cough more at first, and you may have headaches.

These things happen because your body is used to nicotine. They are called nicotine withdrawal symptoms. The symptoms are strongest during the first few days after you stop smoking, but most go away within a few weeks.

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What about nicotine replacement products or medicine to help me stop smoking?

Nicotine replacement products are ways to take in nicotine without smoking. These products come in several forms: gum, patch, nasal spray, inhaler and lozenge. You can buy the nicotine gum, patch and lozenge without a prescription from your doctor. Nicotine replacement works by lessening your body's craving for nicotine and reducing withdrawal symptoms. This lets you focus on the changes you need to make in your habits and environment. Once you feel more confident as a nonsmoker, dealing with your nicotine addiction is easier.

Prescription medicines such as bupropion and varenicline help some people stop smoking. These medicines do not contain nicotine, but help you resist your urges to smoke.

Talk to your doctor about which of these products is likely to give you the best chance of success. For any of these products to work, you must carefully follow the directions on the package. It's very important that you don't smoke while using nicotine replacement products.

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Will I gain weight when I stop smoking?

Most people gain a few pounds after they stop smoking. Remember that any weight gain is a minor health risk compared to the risks of smoking. Dieting while you're trying to stop smoking will cause unnecessary stress. Instead, limit your weight gain by having healthy, low-fat snacks on hand and being physically active.

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What if I smoke again?

Don't feel like a failure. Think about why you smoked and what you can do to keep from smoking again. Set a new stop date. Many ex-smokers did not succeed at first, but they kept trying.

The first few days after stopping will probably be the hardest. Just remember that even one puff on a cigarette can cause a relapse, so don't risk it.

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Other Organizations

- [AAFP's Ask and Act](http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/clinical/publichealth/tobacco/resources.html)
<http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/clinical/publichealth/tobacco/resources.html>
- [Nicotine Anonymous](http://www.nicotine-anonymous.org)
<http://www.nicotine-anonymous.org>
- [American Lung Association](http://www.lungusa.org)
<http://www.lungusa.org>
- [American Cancer Society](#)

- <http://www.cancer.org>
- [American Heart Association](http://www.heart.org)
<http://www.heart.org>
- [National Cancer Institute](http://www.cancer.gov)
<http://www.cancer.gov>
- [Revolution Health Addiction Community](http://www.revolutionhealth.com/forums/addiction)
<http://www.revolutionhealth.com/forums/addiction>

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