



How to Quit Smoking

Within hours of stopping cigarettes, your body starts to recover from the effects of nicotine and additives. Blood pressure, heart rate, and body temperature -- all of which are elevated because of the nicotine in cigarettes -- return to healthier levels. Your lung capacity increases and the bronchial tubes relax, making breathing easier. Poisonous carbon monoxide in your blood decreases, allowing the blood to carry more oxygen.

For many reasons, quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do -- for your short- and long-term health.

Is It Hard to Quit Smoking?

It's a challenge to quit smoking. How much difficulty you will have depends on several factors, including:

- The number of cigarettes you smoke daily
- The number of people you spend time with who smoke (parents, friends, and co-workers)
- The reasons you smoke (weight control, social situations, peer pressure)

Why Is Smoking So Addictive?

Blame nicotine, the main drug in tobacco, for your smoking addiction. Your brain quickly adapts to nicotine and develops a tolerance for it. (And when you develop a tolerance to a drug, you're usually addicted.) Did you know that nicotine acts on some of the same brain pathways as cocaine?

When you first start smoking, you might feel a big rush from just one cigarette. But, over time, the more cigarettes you smoke, the more you need to smoke to get that same feeling. This is called *tolerance*, and it is the mechanism behind addiction.

Tolerance happens when your brain tries to keep itself balanced. Chemicals from the cigarette make the brain release chemicals called norepinephrine and dopamine. If the brain releases too much of these two chemicals, the brain chemistry gets imbalanced and releases its own "anti-nicotine" chemicals when you smoke. These "anti-nicotine" chemicals would make you feel down, depressed, and tired if you were not smoking.

Over time, the brain learns to predict when you are going to smoke a cigarette -- and releases the "anti-nicotine" chemicals. These chemicals make you feel depressed and tired, so you think, "I need a cigarette!"

A "trigger" is anything your brain has connected with smoking. Everyone's triggers are different. Yours might include the smell of cigarette smoke, having an ashtray next to you, seeing a carton of cigarettes at the store, having certain food or drinks, ending a good meal, or talking with someone with whom you normally smoke cigarettes after school or at a club. Sometimes just the way you feel (sad or happy) is a trigger. One of the biggest keys to quitting smoking is understanding the triggers that make you crave smoking.

But I Really Want to Quit Smoking!

There are different ways of quitting smoking. Some work better than others. The best strategy is to choose a method that will challenge you to quit, but also one that you can achieve.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Cold turkey (no outside help). About 90% of people who try to quit smoking do it without outside support -- no aids, therapy, or medicine. Although many people try to quit this way, it is not the most effective and successful method. Only about 10% of people who try to quit this way succeed on their first try.

2. Behavioral therapy. With behavioral therapy, you visit a therapist who will help you find the most effective way to quit. The therapist will help you to identify your triggers, come up with ways to get through cravings, and provide emotional support when you need it most.

3. Nicotine replacement therapy. Nicotine gum, patches, inhalers, and lozenges are nicotine replacement therapies (called NRT). Replacement therapy works by giving you nicotine without you having to smoke. You may be 50% to 100% more likely quit smoking if you use nicotine replacement therapy. But if you're under 18, you need to get your doctor's permission to use nicotine replacement therapy. This therapy works best when combined with behavioral therapy and lots of support from friends and family.

4. Medicine. Some medicines, including Zyban and Chantix, are formulated to help people quit smoking. Your doctor must prescribe these medications.

5. Combination treatments. Using a combination of treatment methods can increase your chances of quitting. For example, using both a nicotine patch and gum may be better than a patch alone. Other proven combination treatments include behavioral therapy and nicotine replacement therapy, prescription medication with a nicotine patch, and nicotine patch and nicotine spray.

Your New Rules for Quitting Smoking

There are some important things to remember when quitting smoking:

1. Know your triggers and avoid them early on. Try to stay away from situations that normally make you feel like smoking, especially during the first three months. This is when you are most likely to start smoking again.

2. Know that the first few days are the toughest. If you are quitting "cold turkey," the first few days are the hardest. You will probably feel irritable, depressed, slow, and tired. Once you get past those first days, you will begin to feel normal (but still have cigarette cravings).

3. Don't give in to your craving to smoke. Every time you don't smoke when you have a craving, your chances of quitting successfully go up.

4. Start a new activity with friends who don't smoke. This can increase your chances of quitting smoking.

Perhaps smoking is a real part of your identity and your life. Giving up a part of your identity is difficult. You may feel sad that you do not smoke anymore. This is a normal feeling. But remember that feeling sad may be one of your triggers.

What If I Start Smoking Again?

It's called "relapse." Relapse is normal in strong addictions like smoking. Many people quit and relapse several times before quitting permanently. If you relapse, at least minimize the amount you smoke during the relapse. For example, if you smoked eight cigarettes a day before quitting and only smoke four cigarettes a day when you relapse, you have made some progress. Don't lose hope – quitting is a process that might take some time.