



# Patient Information

## Tips for Quitting Smoking

**N**icotine is an addictive drug that is naturally found in tobacco. When smoke is inhaled, the nicotine is carried throughout your body and absorbed quickly into your bloodstream. Nicotine inhaled through a cigarette reaches the brain faster than other drugs. Regardless of your age, or how long you've been smoking, the choice to quit will help you live longer and healthier. Approximately half of all smokers who keep smoking will end up dying from a smoking-related illness. In the United States, smoking accounts for nearly 1 in 5 deaths, and about 8.6 million people are affected by smoking-related diseases. If you quit smoking before the age of 50, you can cut your risk of dying in the next 15 years in half, as opposed to those who continue to smoke.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, there are immediate health benefits of quitting smoking for men and women of all ages, as well as long-term benefits, including a lower risk of various types of cancers. Encouragement and support from family members, friends, and coworkers can help you quit smoking and remain smoke-free; however, the desire and commitment to quit must be your own.

### What can quitting do for me?

In addition to immediate health benefits, quitting smoking will lower the risk of various types of cancers developing, and for experiencing heart attack, stroke, or chronic lung disease.

Within 20 minutes of quitting, your heart rate and blood pressure will drop to a normal level; 12 hours after quitting, the carbon

monoxide level in your blood drops back to normal. Between 2 weeks and 3 months of not having a cigarette, the circulation in your body will improve, and your lung function will increase. After 15 years of not smoking, your risk of developing coronary heart disease is equal to that of a nonsmoker.

### What makes quitting so hard?

You will experience similar adverse effects from quitting smoking as you would from withdrawal from any other addiction. Symptoms include intense nicotine cravings, difficulty concentrating, drowsiness, sleepiness, headaches, weight gain, and irritability. The severity of these symptoms is dependent on how long you've smoked and how many cigarettes you have per day. However, it is important to remember that the pros of quitting outweigh the negatives.

Withdrawal from nicotine is twofold: physical and mental. Although annoying, the physical symptoms are not life threatening, and nicotine replacement or medication can help reduce the severity.

Rationalizing the need for just 1 cigarette can detour you from successfully quitting smoking. A few thoughts that you may experience are "I'll just have 1 to get through this rough spot," "Today is not a good day. I'll quit tomorrow," and "Air pollution is probably just as bad."

Counseling services, self-help materials, and medicines are available to provide smokers with more tools than ever to help quit smoking for good. You can also seek help through telephone-based services (such as help lines and smartphone applications) and support groups.



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### How do I get started?

If you're ready to take hold of your smoking addiction and start living a healthier life, set a quit date and quit completely on that day. It doesn't have to be within 24 hours, or within a week, but pick a date within the next month, giving yourself enough time to prepare mentally—but not enough time to change your mind. In the days leading up to your quit date, begin reducing your cigarette use. Making a list of why you want to quit will help you keep your eye on the prize. Include both short- and long-term benefits.

At the times you are most likely to smoke, list some ideas of what you will do instead. If you normally drink coffee in the morning before you have a cigarette, start drinking tea instead. If after a meal you normally smoke, try another activity, such as playing an instrument, eating fruit, or going for a walk.

Set up a support system, a group of friends and family members who can give you the encouragement you need when you feel like giving up. Make sure your friends and family know that you're trying to quit smoking, and ask those who smoke to not smoke around you.

### How can I stay smoke free?

The commitment to quitting smoking is the final, longest, and most important stage of the process. Using the same methods you used to begin the process can be helpful to maintain your new, smoke-free life.

Review your reasons for quitting in the first place, and the benefits to your health, finances, and family. The desire to smoke will come and go, but make sure you resist the temptation. There is no such thing as just 1 cigarette, or even just 1 puff. Also, try to avoid alcohol. Drinking lowers your chance of success.

Eating celery or other low-calorie snacks, or chewing sugarless gum, will help you satisfy your oral habit and maintain your weight. Exercise can help relieve the urge to smoke and fight the possible weight gain. Exercising also requires you to keep your hands busy, thus resisting the urge to fill your hands with a cigarette.

Set short-term goals for quitting, and reward yourself when the goals are met. Instead of spending money on cigarettes, put the money in a jar or somewhere else that is safe. After you've reached a certain amount of time without a cigarette, reward yourself with something, such as a new outfit or a trip somewhere fun.

Some hospitals, health departments, community centers, and workplaces offer smoking cessation programs. Your health care provider may prescribe medication, but over-the-counter products, such as nicotine patches, gums, and sprays, may also be used.

There is no surefire way to quit smoking. Different ways work for different people. If exercising doesn't work for you, try something else. It's important not to get discouraged if your first try isn't successful. Nicotine addiction is a difficult habit to break.

For more tips for quitting smoking, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quitsmoking/index.htm>. ●

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