

# Smoking and mental illness

## Why change smoking habits?

People with a mental illness can, and do, quit smoking, for a number of very good reasons.

- ④ Diseases caused by smoking are the second largest killer of people who have a mental illness.
- ④ People who change their smoking habits get a real boost in their confidence and feel a great sense of achievement.
- ④ Quitting improves people's appearance and hygiene, with stained teeth and fingers and the smell of smoke disappearing.
- ④ People who quit smoking may only need a lower dose of anti-psychotic medication.
- ④ Those who do quit have more money to spend on enjoyable things like going to the movies as well as essentials like paying the rent or buying food.

## Do people with mental illness smoke more?

Around 32% of people with mental illness smoke cigarettes, compared to just 18% of the general population. The rate is far higher among people with schizophrenia. It is estimated that nearly 40% of all smokers have a mental illness. Like all smokers, they use tobacco because it can be a way of dealing with feelings such as boredom or stress, and they become physically addicted to nicotine. Nicotine and other chemicals in cigarettes may temporarily affect the positive and negative symptoms of schizophrenia. As a consequence, smokers generally need higher doses of antipsychotic medication, which can lead to increased side-effects. People with a history of depression also need extra support when they try to quit smoking, in particular from a doctor.

## Deciding to quit?

Most people make a number of attempts before they successfully quit smoking. Just as you 'learned' to smoke, you can also learn to become smokefree – and this can take time.

- ④ Smokers need to make a decision to change their smoking habits. Try writing down the reasons for wanting to change and keep them with your cigarettes.
- ④ Plan how to quit. Find the right support person or program. Consider using nicotine patches or gum to help.
- ④ A positive part of quitting is working out how to spend the money previously spent on cigarettes. Work out how many packets you smoke a week and how much you will save each week by quitting. You'll be surprised at how much you will save over a year by quitting.

## How do I start to quit?

If you think you're ready to quit, discuss this with your doctor so you work out a plan together. The doctor can monitor medication levels and side-effects, advise on antidepressant medication and use of nicotine patches, chewing gum, lozenges or a nicotine inhaler. Talk to other people who have quit for tips about what helped them. Call the Quitline for advice on 13 7848 and see the Quit website at [www.quitnow.info.au](http://www.quitnow.info.au) for more information. You can also use the *SANE Guide to a Smokefree Life*, specially written to help people affected by mental illness to quit smoking.

## How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have. SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness. For more information about this topic see:

- ④ [SANE Guide to a SmokeFree Life](#)  
Provides practical step-by-step tips for consumers and supporters on how to quit smoking.
- ④ [SANE Guide to Healthy Living](#)  
Explains the benefits of being physically healthy, gives tips on how to start becoming healthier and overcome obstacles as well as giving suggestions on finding support to help stay healthy.
- ④ [SANE Smokefree Kit](#)  
This revised edition helps people with a mental illness give up smoking. The kit is designed to be used by workers in the drug and alcohol, smoking cessation or mental health fields.
- ④ [SANE Guide to Drugs](#)  
Explains the relationship between drugs and mental illness, and provides information and tips on reducing and stopping drug use, and supporting someone else to do so.

To order, visit the SANE Bookshop at [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org) or call 1800 18 SANE (7263).