

Ways to Quit Smoking for Good

When you smoke, you're exposing yourself to more than 4,000 chemicals, including cyanide, benzene, and ammonia – and at least 40 of those chemicals can cause cancer. Perhaps the best known is nicotine, an addictive compound that can make it ferociously hard to stop smoking.

How will my health improve if I stop smoking?

Your body benefits as soon as you stop smoking. According to the American Lung Association, within 20 minutes of your last cigarette your elevated blood pressure and pulse rate drop to normal. After a couple of days, your abilities to smell and taste improve and your damaged nerve endings start to repair themselves. Within a few months, walking and other physical activities will become easier and your lung function will increase by up to 30 percent. After five years, you'll have nearly halved your odds of getting lung cancer.

How can I quit successfully?

Make a plan. Preparing to quit is an important first step. There's no one right way to stop smoking, but smokers who lay the groundwork are much more likely to succeed. Make a list of the people, places, and pastimes associated with your smoking – anything that "triggers" your behavior. One of the hardest things about being a regular smoker and then giving it up is that you'll always know how good that after-dinner smoke tastes. Come up with a plan for coping with each of those triggers. For example, after a meal you may want to get up and take a walk or brush your teeth. If a cigarette automatically appears in your mouth when you leave work at the end of the day, substitute a lollipop or a toothpick. If a glass of wine makes you reach for a cigarette, you may want to avoid alcohol for the first week or so.

Set a quit date. Pick a date that's realistic and allows you to develop your plan. Try to select a time period when you don't anticipate being under much stress yet will be too busy to sit around thinking about smoking. It may also help to start at a time when you'll have a little extra impetus. For example, if you're going to visit people around whom you can't smoke (your grandparents or your in-laws, perhaps), vow to remain smoke-free after the trip is over. You'll have a few days under your belt already.

Tell your friends and family about your plan. Having their support and knowing they're counting on you can increase your motivation to stick with it.

If involving others doesn't suit you, become a "quiet quitter." For some people, kicking the habit without all the fanfare and questions from concerned supporters is easier in the long run. Knowing that everyone's "counting on you" might stress you to the point of failure instead of bolstering your resolve. Which approach will work best depends on your personality.



Take it day-by-day, or even trigger-by-trigger. This may sound like "addiction-speak," but it works. To approach the process by thinking, "I can't wait until I've been nicotine-free for a week" won't help you with that craving you get with your morning coffee on the very first day.

Keep busy. If you find yourself obsessing about smoking, find something to do. Come up with activities that engage you in some way: Make a quick phone call, take a short walk, talk with a coworker or friend.

Develop new interests. Take a class, embark on a household improvement project, or start an exercise routine. Exercise – whether walking, biking, jogging, swimming, or taking an aerobics class – can distract your mind and body from the desire for cigarettes. Any of these activities can make you feel better and improve your health. And chances are the healthier you feel, the less you'll want to taint that by smoking.

Get support and encouragement. Make an arrangement with someone you can call anytime, day or night, whenever the urge to smoke gets overwhelming. This can be particularly helpful if you have a sudden emotional shock or a slipup.

What if I fail the first time?

If you slip up and have a cigarette or two, it doesn't need to bring your program to a crashing halt. "Cheating" or lighting up once over a cup of coffee needn't put you back on the road to a pack a day. Remind yourself that quitting is hard. Just like anything that's difficult, you're not going to get it right immediately. Figure out what caused you to smoke, and learn from it. The key is to move on from the slipup, because berating yourself will only add to your stress and may make you fall off the wagon completely. Treat it as a bump in a road you're still traveling down. Remind yourself why you want to quit, and get back on track again as a nonsmoker.

For more information on smoking cessation, visit empireblue.com.

These links may also be helpful:

<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco>

<http://www.smokefree.gov>

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