

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Quit Smoking: Why and How?

More than 50 million Americans smoke. People begin smoking for many reasons—stress, social status, and peer pressure—but the main reason they continue is addiction to nicotine. Smoking is, in fact, so addictive that some people consider giving up cigarettes harder than quitting an addictive illicit drug.

People also continue to smoke for psychological reasons. For some, smoking seems to give the hands something to do. Others say it provides comfort. Cigarette smoke, however, contains more than 4,000 chemicals, and, when inhaled, they merge into a tar-like substance that sticks to the tissues inside the mouth, throat, lungs, and stomach. The chemicals not only damage the tissues they contact directly, but they also harm the entire body by reducing the amount of well-oxygenated blood that reaches the organs. Smoking affects nearly every organ in the body—heart, brain, stomach, bladder, kidneys, and even the skin. People who smoke also double or triple their risk of developing cataracts.

Why quit smoking?

Smoking affects not only your health. Second-hand smoke can cause damage to those around you—even family and friends who choose not to smoke. If you quit smoking:

- You'll live longer and you and your family will live better.
- You won't be winded when walking up a flight of stairs.
- You'll be able to exercise and keep your heart healthier.
- You will reduce the risk of developing dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease.
- Your baby will be at less risk of suffering from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).



- You'll have less heartburn.
- For men, smoking increases the chances of impotence, so your love life will improve as well.
- You'll also be giving yourself money each month to spend on yourself and not on cigarettes.

What happens when I quit smoking?

Quitting smoking has many benefits. Within 1 month of quitting, you will decrease your heart rate, the level of carbon monoxide in your blood, and your risk of

How do I quit smoking?

- Make a serious mental commitment to quitting.
- Set a quit date.
- Refer to yourself as to a non-smoker in the present tense. For example, say, "I am a non-smoker." Similar affirmations that fit your individual situation may also be helpful.
- Get rid of all cigarettes and smoking accessories (such as ashtrays) in your home, car, and other places where you might be tempted to smoke.
- Do not let people smoke in your home.
- Get support and encouragement from family, friends, co-workers and former smokers and consider joining a former smokers' support group.
- When tempted, perform tasks that could help distract you: go for a walk, brush your teeth, exercise, or take a bath.
- Drink lots of fluids, preferably those with caffeine.
- Avoid drinking alcohol and avoid contact with smokers.
- You may want to try one of the many medications available to help smokers quit.

Quitting smoking is not easy. If it were, many more people would quit daily. You may find yourself suffering from irritability, nervousness, and sleeplessness. You may feel the need to have something in your mouth or hands. Chewing gum or mints can easily substitute for cigarettes, and rubber bands, paper clips, or other gadgets will help keep your hands busy. For most people, the side effects pass within a few days. It is critically important not to dwell on these adverse signs and to remain focused on the advantages of quitting.

heart attack. The long-term benefits include reducing risks for stroke; lung, stomach, bladder and other cancers; coronary heart disease, such as heart attack; chronic lung diseases and chronic cough; stomach ulcers; and peripheral artery disease. The risk of your child being born with low weight will also decrease. Within 5 years of quitting, your risk of stroke is the same as that of a non-smoker. In 15 years, your heart attack risk is the same as of non-smokers of the same age.

What's the bottom line?

Smoking is a physical and psychological addiction that is not at all easy to break. Most smokers have to kick the habit more than once to finally quit. If you are unsuccessful the first or second time, try again. Don't see the initial attempts as failures, but as opportunities to find out how not to quit. With a sincere commitment and perseverance, you will be able to quit. When you do, your family, friends, and most of all, your body will thank you for rising to the challenge. Here's to your being the next non-smoker in America! ■



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