

# AgePage

## Smoking: It's Never Too Late To Stop

*“I’ve smoked a pack of cigarettes a day for 40 years—what’s the use of quitting now?”*

If you quit smoking, you are likely to add years to your life, breathe more easily, enjoy food more, and save money. Whether you are young or old, you will also:

- ◆ Lower your risk for cancer, heart attack, and lung disease
- ◆ Have better blood circulation
- ◆ Improve your sense of taste and smell
- ◆ Over time, get rid of the smell of smoke in your clothes and house
- ◆ Set a healthy example for your children and grandchildren

Smoking can shorten your life. Smoking makes millions of Americans sick by causing:

- ◆ **Lung disease.** Smoking damages your lungs and airways, sometimes causing chronic bronchitis. It can also

cause a lung disease called emphysema that destroys your lungs, making it very hard for you to breathe.

- ◆ **Heart disease.** If you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol (a fatty substance in the blood) and also smoke, you increase your chance of having a heart attack.
- ◆ **Cancer.** Smoking can cause cancer of the lungs, mouth, larynx (voice box), esophagus, stomach, liver, pancreas, kidney, bladder, and cervix.
- ◆ **Respiratory problems.** If you smoke, you are more likely than a nonsmoker to get the flu (influenza), pneumonia, or other infections that can interfere with your breathing.
- ◆ **Osteoporosis.** You have a greater chance of developing osteoporosis as you get older. If you also smoke, your chance of developing weak bones is greater.

### Nicotine Is A Drug

Nicotine is the drug in tobacco that makes tobacco products addictive. People become addicted to nicotine. That’s one reason why the first few weeks after quitting are the hardest. Some people who give up smoking have withdrawal symptoms. They may become grumpy,

hungry, or tired. Some people have headaches, feel depressed, or have problems sleeping or concentrating. On the other hand, some people have no withdrawal symptoms.

## Breaking The Addiction

*Josephine remembers she started smoking in high school because she wanted to be part of the “cool” crowd. That was more than 50 years ago. Now, she wishes she had never started. She has trouble breathing, many of her clothes have burns from cigarette ash, and even worse, her grandchildren complain she smells like smoke. She wonders if she’ll be able to stop after all these years.*

Many people say the first step to stop smoking is to make a firm decision to quit and pick a definite date you will stop. Then make a clear plan for how you will stick to it.

Your plan might include:

- ◆ Reading self-help information
- ◆ Using individual or group counseling
- ◆ Joining a support group
- ◆ Asking a friend to quit with you
- ◆ Using nicotine replacement therapy
- ◆ Taking medicine to help with symptoms of nicotine withdrawal

Find what works best for you. Some people say that using many approaches to quitting is the answer.

## Help With Quitting

*Miguel joined the Navy right after college. He thought smoking made him look older. Pretty soon he was hooked. Now, at 61, the doctor has told him he has emphysema and needs to stop smoking. His wife and children want him to stop, too. He wonders what can help him with withdrawal symptoms.*

When you quit, you may need support to cope with your body’s desire for nicotine. Nicotine replacement therapy can help some smokers quit. You can buy nicotine replacement products like chewing gum, patches, or lozenges over-the-counter.

There are also nicotine replacement products that require a doctor’s prescription. A nicotine nasal spray or inhaler can reduce withdrawal symptoms, and make it easier for you to quit smoking. Other drugs can also be helpful with some of the withdrawal symptoms not caused by nicotine. Talk to your doctor about what medicines would be the best for you.

## Cigars, Pipes, Chewing Tobacco, And Snuff Are Not Safe

Some people think smokeless tobacco (chewing tobacco and snuff), pipes, and cigars are safe. They are not.

Using smokeless tobacco can cause cancer of the mouth, pre-cancerous lesions known as oral leukoplakia, nicotine addiction, and possibly cancer of the larynx and esophagus, as well as gum problems. Pipe and cigar smokers may develop cancer of the mouth, lip, larynx, esophagus, and bladder. Those who inhale are also at increased risk of getting lung cancer.

## Secondhand Smoke

Smokers create secondhand smoke, which can cause health problems for everyone exposed to the smoke. Secondhand smoke is very dangerous for people who have lung conditions or heart disease. It may cause bronchitis, pneumonia, an asthma attack, or lung cancer. In babies and young children, it can cause inner ear infections.

## Good News About Quitting

The good news is that after you quit:

- ◆ Your lungs, heart, and circulatory system will begin to function better
- ◆ Your chance of having a heart attack or stroke will drop
- ◆ Your breathing will improve
- ◆ Your chance of getting cancer will be lower

No matter how old you are, all of these health benefits are important reasons for you to think about making a plan to stop smoking.

*Clyde's doctor told him he needed to quit smoking. Then, when his 16-year-old granddaughter asked him to stop smoking, he decided to try. Whenever he felt the urge to smoke, he ate nuts or chewed gum instead. Sometimes, he would take a fast walk until the urge to smoke passed. The walk had the added benefit of helping him lose some weight. A year later, he's proud of his success and his granddaughter's smile makes it all worthwhile.*

## For More Information

Here are some helpful resources:

### **American Cancer Society**

250 Williams Street, NW  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
1-800-227-2345 (toll-free)  
1-866-228-4327 (TTY/toll-free)

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

### **American Heart Association**

7272 Greenville Avenue  
Dallas, TX 75231  
1-800-242-8721 (toll-free)

[www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

**Centers for Disease Control  
and Prevention**

**Office on Smoking and Health**

4770 Buford Highway

MS K-50

Atlanta, GA 30341-3717

1-800-232-4636 (toll-free)

1-888-232-6348 (TTY/toll-free)

*www.cdc.gov/tobacco*

**National Cancer Institute  
Public Inquiries Office**

6116 Executive Boulevard, Suite 300  
Bethesda, MD 20892-8322

1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237/  
toll-free)

*www.cancer.gov*

**National Heart, Lung, and Blood  
Institute**

**Health Information Center**

P.O. Box 30105

Bethesda, MD 20824-0105

1-301-592-8573

1-240-629-3255 (TTY)

*www.nhlbi.nih.gov*

**National Library of Medicine**

MedlinePlus

*www.medlineplus.gov*

**Smokefree.gov**

1-800-QUITNOW (1-800-784-8669/  
toll-free)

1-800-332-8615 (TTY/toll-free)

*www.smokefree.gov*

For more information about health  
and aging, contact:

**National Institute on Aging  
Information Center**

P.O. Box 8057

Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057

1-800-222-2225 (toll-free)

1-800-222-4225 (TTY/toll-free)

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*www.nia.nih.gov/Espanol*

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information from the NIA, go to  
*www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation.*

Visit NIHSeniorHealth

(*www.nihseniorhealth.gov*), a senior-  
friendly website from the National  
Institute on Aging and the National  
Library of Medicine. This website has  
health information for older adults.  
Special features make it simple to use.  
For example, you can click on a button  
to have the text read out loud or to  
make the type larger.



**National Institute on Aging**

National Institutes of Health  
U.S. Department of Health and  
Human Services

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