

AgePage

Smoking: It's Never Too Late to Stop

"I've smoked two packs of cigarettes a day for 40 years—what's the use of quitting now?"

No matter your age, quitting smoking improves your health. If you quit smoking, you are likely to add years to your life, breathe more easily, and save money. You will also:

- ◆ Lower your risk of cancer, heart attack, stroke, and lung disease
- ◆ Have better blood circulation
- ◆ Improve your sense of taste and smell
- ◆ Stop smelling like smoke
- ◆ Set a healthy example for your children and grandchildren

Smoking shortens your life. It causes about 1 of every 5 deaths in the United States each year. 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 disease called emphysema that destroys your lungs, making it very hard for you to breathe.

- ◆ **Heart disease.** Smoking increases your risk of heart attack and stroke.
- ◆ **Cancer.** Smoking can lead to cancer of the lung, 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.** If you smoke, your chance of developing osteoporosis (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 feel grumpy, hungry, or tired. Some people have headaches, feel depressed, or have problems sleeping or concentrating. These symptoms fade over time. 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 her grandchildren complain she smells like smoke. But, 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 to stop. Then make a clear plan for how you will stick to it.

Your plan might include:

- ◆ Talking with your doctor
- ◆ Setting a quit date, when you stop smoking completely
- ◆ Developing a plan for dealing with urges to smoke
- ◆ Reading self-help information
- ◆ Going to individual or group counseling
- ◆ Asking a friend for help
- ◆ Taking medicine to help with symptoms of nicotine withdrawal
- ◆ Calling your state quitline (1-800-784-8669 or 1-800-QUITNOW) or visiting www.smokefree.gov on the internet

Find what works best for you. Using many approaches to quitting may be 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 products help some smokers quit. You can buy gum, patches, or lozenges over-the-counter.

There are also 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 may also help with withdrawal symptoms. Talk to your doctor about what medicines might be 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. Smokeless tobacco causes cancer of the mouth and pancreas. It also causes pre-cancerous lesions known as oral leukoplakia, gum problems, and nicotine addiction. 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 Is Dangerous

Secondhand smoke created by cigarettes, cigars, and pipes can cause serious health problems for family, friends, and even pets of smokers. Secondhand smoke is especially dangerous for people who already have lung or heart disease. In adults, secondhand smoke can cause heart disease and lung cancer. In babies it can cause Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Children are also more likely to have lung problems, ear infections, and severe asthma if they are around secondhand smoke.

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 to make 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 carrot sticks or chewed gum instead. Sometimes, he would take a brisk walk until the urge to smoke passed. The walk had the added benefit of helping him lose some weight and become more active. 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

American Heart Association

7272 Greenville Avenue
Dallas, TX 75231
1-800-242-8721 (toll-free)
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
1-800-422-6237
(1-800-4-CANCER/toll-free)
1-877-448-7848
(1-877-44U-QUIT/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
www.nhlbi.nih.gov

National Library of Medicine
MedlinePlus
www.medlineplus.gov

Smokefree.gov
1-800-784-8669
(1-800-QUITNOW/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)
www.nia.nih.gov
www.nia.nih.gov/espanol

To sign up for regular email alerts about new publications and other information from the NIA, go to www.nia.nih.gov/health.

Visit www.nihseniorhealth.gov, a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This website has health and wellness information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to make the type larger.



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