

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?"

If you quit smoking, you are likely to add years to your life, breathe more easily, and have more energy. You will have extra money for spending or saving, and food will taste better. When you quit smoking, you join over a million people who stop smoking each year. Whether you are young or old, you will also:

- ◆ have less chance of cancer, heart attack, and lung disease,
- ◆ have better blood circulation,
- ◆ have no odor of smoke in your clothes and hair,
- ◆ set a healthy example for children and grandchildren,



- ◆ have a more sensitive sense of smell,
- ◆ have a better sense of taste, and
- ◆ have healthier family members, particularly children and grandchildren.

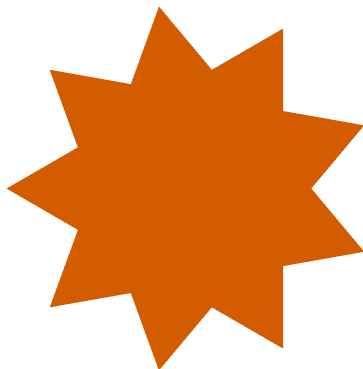
What Smoking Does

Cigarette smoke damages your lungs and airways. Air passages swell and, over time, you will have more and more trouble clearing mucus from your air passages. This can cause a cough that won't go away. Sometimes this leads to a lung disease called chronic bronchitis. If you keep smoking, normal breathing may become harder and harder as emphysema develops. In emphysema, your lung tissue is destroyed, making it very hard to get enough oxygen.

Smoking can shorten your life. It brings an early death to more than 400,000 people in the United States each year. Lifelong smokers have a 1 in 2 chance of dying from a smoking-related disease. Smoking cuts years off the end of your life. Smoking makes millions of Americans sick by causing:

- ◆ *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. Quitting will greatly lower your risk of heart disease.



- ◆ *Cancer.* Smoking can cause cancer of the lungs, mouth, larynx (voice box), esophagus, stomach, liver, pancreas, kidney, bladder, and cervix. Your chance of getting cancer gets greater the more cigarettes you smoke each day and the more years you smoke.
- ◆ *Respiratory problems.* If you smoke, you are more likely than a non-smoker to get the flu (influenza), pneumonia, or other infections that can interfere with your breathing. These can be very dangerous, especially for older people.
- ◆ *Osteoporosis.* If you are an older woman who smokes, your chance of developing osteoporosis is greater. Women who are past menopause tend to lose bone strength and sometimes develop this bone-weakening disorder. Bones weakened by osteoporosis

break more easily. Also, women smokers tend to begin menopause sooner than the average woman does, putting them at risk at an earlier age.

Good News About Quitting

As soon as you stop smoking, your lungs, heart, and circulatory system (the arteries and veins that blood flows through) start getting better.

- ◆ Your chance of heart attack, stroke, and other circulatory diseases begins to drop within the first year after you quit.
- ◆ Within one year of quitting you are almost half as likely to develop heart disease as you were before.
- ◆ The flow of blood to your hands and feet gets stronger.
- ◆ Your breathing becomes easier within a few months after your last cigarette.
- ◆ Your chance of getting cancer from smoking also begins to shrink. The sooner you quit, the greater the benefit to your health. Within 10 to 15 years after quitting, your risk of cancer may be almost as low as that of a nonsmoker.

Worried about putting on pounds?

You may be worried about gaining weight if you stop smoking. Don't be. Many people who stop smoking gain little or no weight. But, even if you add a few pounds, you will be healthier than if you continued smoking.

Nicotine Is a Drug

Nicotine is a drug-like chemical in cigarette smoke. It is the main reason tobacco products are addictive. At first, when you smoke, nicotine makes you feel good. This might make you want to smoke more. Soon, your body starts to need more nicotine in order to feel good. Then you smoke even more to keep getting that pleasurable feeling.

The first few weeks after quitting are the hardest. Some people who give up smoking have withdrawal symptoms. You may become grumpy, hungry, or tired. You may have headaches, feel depressed, or have problems sleeping or concentrating. Some people have no withdrawal symptoms at all.

Breaking the Addiction

Smoking is a strong addiction for both your body and mind. That is why it is so hard to stop. But, people do succeed. Since 1965 over 40 million Americans who used to smoke have quit. There is help. You can:

- ◆ read self-help literature,
- ◆ use individual or group counseling,
- ◆ join a support group,
- ◆ ask a friend to quit with you,
- ◆ take medicine to help with nicotine withdrawal, or
- ◆ use nicotine replacement therapy.

Each person is different. Find what works best for you. Sometimes combining several methods is the answer. Some people can stop on their own. Others—maybe you—need help from doctors, clinics, or organized groups.

The first step is to make a firm decision to quit. Then, choose a date to stop smoking, and pick one or more methods for quitting. Before you stop, try changing your

smoking habits. For example, if you smoke a cigarette after each meal, wait a while at first. Perhaps you smoke while reading the newspaper. Try to chew gum instead. Then, when you do stop smoking, habits such as these may be easier to stop.

When you quit, you may need special help to cope with your body's desire for nicotine. Nicotine replacement therapy can help some smokers control withdrawal symptoms as they quit. You can buy some nicotine replacement products over-the-counter. Check with your doctor first to see if one is a good choice for you. He or she might recommend one of the over-the-counter forms:

- ◆ *nicotine chewing gum*
- ◆ *nicotine patch*
- ◆ *nicotine lozenge*

But, these require a doctor's prescription:

- ◆ *nicotine nasal spray*
- ◆ *nicotine inhaler*

These give nicotine to the body without the harmful substances found in tobacco smoke. They reduce withdrawal symptoms. This makes it easier

for you to overcome your addiction to tobacco. Also, this dose of nicotine is less than that from a cigarette and is tapered off during the treatment period.

There is a drug to help you handle your cravings.

Known as bupropion hydrochloride, it does not contain nicotine and must be prescribed by your doctor. The most common side effects are dry mouth and sleep problems.

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, pharynx, esophagus, and bladder. Those who inhale are also at increased risk of getting lung cancer.

Secondhand Smoke

If you are around someone who smokes, you could be exposed to secondhand smoke from his or her cigarette, pipe, or cigar. We now know that secondhand smoke can make nonsmokers sick. Adults who don't smoke but live or work with smokers are more likely to develop lung cancer than other nonsmokers. It has also been linked to heart disease in nonsmokers.

Secondhand smoke is very dangerous for someone with asthma, other lung conditions, or heart disease. It may cause bronchitis, pneumonia, an asthma attack, or inner ear infections in babies and young children. It may be associated with SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome). These problems are just some good reasons for a parent or grandparent to think about quitting smoking. Everyone should try not to smoke indoors around others of any age.

Where To Get Help

Organizations, doctors, and clinics offering stop-smoking programs are listed in telephone books under headings such as "Smokers' Treatment and Information Centers." Further information can be obtained from

organizations such as the following. These three organizations have many local chapters which can be found in a local telephone directory:

American Cancer Society

1599 Clifton Road, NE
Atlanta, GA 30329
1-800-ACS-2345
(1-800-227-2345/toll-free)
www.cancer.org

American Heart Association

7272 Greenville Avenue
Dallas, TX 75231
1-800-AHA-USA1
(1-800-242-8721/toll-free)
www.americanheart.org

American Lung Association

61 Broadway, Sixth Floor
New York, NY 10006
1-800-LUNG-USA
(1-800-586-4872/toll-free)
www.lungusa.org

Several government agencies also have information on the dangers of smoking.

Office on Smoking and Health Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road NE
Atlanta, GA 30333
1-800-311-3435 (toll-free)
www.cdc.gov/tobacco

**National Cancer Institute
Cancer Information Service**

6116 Executive Boulevard
Suite 3035A
Rockville, MD 20852
1-800-4-CANCER
(1-800-422-6237/toll-free)
1-800-332-8615 (TTY/toll-free)

www.cancer.gov

Smokefree.gov

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

www.smokefree.gov

**National Heart, Lung, and
Blood Institute
Health Information Center**

Box 30105
Bethesda, MD 20824-0105
1-301-592-8573
1-240-629-3255 (TTY)

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/

**National Library of Medicine
MedlinePlus**

Search for:
“Secondhand Smoke”
“Smoking”
“Smoking Cessation”
“Smokeless Tobacco”

www.medlineplus.gov



For more information on 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)
E-mail: *niaic@jbs1.com*

The National Institute on Aging website is *www.nia.nih.gov*.

To order publications (in English or Spanish) online, visit *www.niapublications.org*.

Visit **NIHSeniorHealth.gov** (*www.nihseniorhealth.gov*), a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This simple-to-use website features popular health topics for older adults, including one on lung cancer. It has large type and a “talking” function that reads the text out loud.



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