

Nicotine: A Powerful Addiction

If you have tried to quit smoking before, you know how hard it can be. Over time, a smoker's body becomes physically and psychologically dependent on nicotine because it is a very addictive drug. It readily diffuses into the small blood vessels that line the skin, lungs and mucous membranes. Once in the bloodstream, nicotine flows to the brain, where it is responsible for the good feelings as well as the irritability you feel if you try to quit. Within 10 to 15 seconds most smokers are feeling the effects of nicotine.

However, nicotine and its effects are short-lived, lasting anywhere from 40 minutes to a few hours. This leads people to smoke frequently throughout the day to keep the level of nicotine up in their bloodstream. Over time, a smoker also becomes more tolerant to the effects of nicotine. Thus, the body craves more nicotine to reach the same degree of stimulation or relaxation.

What happens when a smoker stops smoking? While smoking, a smoker's body adapts the way it works to compensate for the effects of nicotine. When a smoker quits smoking, these physiological adaptations caused by nicotine remain. Therefore, for the short-term, the body cannot function the way it did before.

The body's withdrawal from nicotine causes irritability, anxiety, depression and a craving for nicotine. Over a period of time, these symptoms and physiological changes subside. But for many, this period of time is mentally and physically distressing. Every year millions of smokers try to break the habit, but only 10 percent succeed. Most give up after only a week because the pull of nicotine seems irresistible.

How to Quit for Good

Consumer Guide to Smoking Cessation



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229-228-2826**

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The best reasons of all to quit smoking are to improve your health and increase your life span. Research has found that if one quits smoking at age 30, 40, 50 or 60, they can add an average of 10, 9, 6 or 3 years, respectively, to their life. Just three months after smoking cessation, an ex-smoker's lung function increases up to 30%. After one year, the chance of having a heart attack is cut in half. The risk of a stroke is reduced to that of a nonsmoker after five years. After ten years, the risk of lung, throat, mouth and esophageal cancer is about half of that of a continuing smoker and fifteen years after an ex-smoker has stopped smoking the risk of coronary heart disease is the same as that of a nonsmoker.

Five Keys for Quitting

Quitting smoking is hard. Most people make at least two attempts to quit before finally being able to quit. Studies have found that using the following five steps as a guide for quitting smoking leads to success.

Get Ready

To get ready to quit smoking you must first set a quit date and stick to it. Change your environment by getting rid of all cigarettes and ashtrays around you and do not let others smoke in your home. If you have tried to quit smoking before, reflect on those past attempts. Think about what worked for you and what did not. Use what you learned to prepare you to quit for good this time.

Get Support

As with many things in life, you have a better chance to successfully quit smoking when you have the support and encouragement of others. Get support by telling your family, friends and co-workers that you are going to quit smoking and you want their support, and also ask them not to smoke around you. You may also want to seek counseling and join a support group.

Alter Your Lifestyle

Get active. Start an exercise program. Join a gym. Do things to reduce your stress such as reading a book or soaking in the tub. Drink lots of water especially during your times of craving. A study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* found that those who exercise vigorously while trying to quit smoking were twice as likely to remain smoke-free and gained about half the weight of those who did not exercise.

Use Medication and Use It Correctly

If you want to quit smoking, it is wise to visit your healthcare provider. They can review your personal health history, offer tips to help you quit and recommend one of five nicotine replacement medications. These medications are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, are safe for most people and can generally double the chances of a person quitting successfully. They include Bupropion hydrochloride (Zyban), a nicotine patch, a nicotine inhaler and a nicotine nasal spray, which are all available only by prescription. Nicotine gum and certain nicotine patches are also available over-the-counter. Ask your healthcare provider to discuss the pros, cons and side effects of each medication to help you decide which would be best for you.

Be Prepared for Relapse

Most relapses occur within the first three months after quitting. Think ahead to those times when you will be tempted to smoke and plan out how you will cope. Think about things you can do to help you cope in these situations. Plan something enjoyable to do as a reward for staying smoke-free. Be prepared for difficult situations like being around other smokers, gaining weight and feeling depressed. Also avoid using alcohol to help you overcome the discouragement if you do relapse. Remember, most people try several times before they finally quit.

Additional Resources

American Heart Association
1-800-AHA-USA1 (242-8721)
www.americanheart.org

American Cancer Society
1-800-227-2345
www.cancer.org

American Lung Association
1-800-548-8252
www.lungusa.org

National Cancer Institute
1-800-4-CANCER
www.cancer.gov

**Office of Smoking and Health
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
1-800-311-3435
www.cdc.gov/tobacco