

## Smoking - quitting tips

Smokers often make several attempts to quit before they succeed. Following some simple strategies and getting extra support when you need it can help you to become, and stay, a non-smoker.

Quit courses, counselling and telephone support can provide extra support. Nicotine replacement therapy is available from pharmacists and supermarkets, or your doctor can prescribe medication to help you quit.

### Most smokers want to quit

Around 15 per cent of the Australian population smoke every day and most smokers want to quit. According to Quit statistics, 81 per cent of Victorian smokers have tried to kick the habit at least once, while about 40 per cent try to quit each year.

Successful quitters see their past attempts as practice and experience to learn from and build on. Some people find that going 'cold turkey' – quitting completely and immediately – is the most successful method for them. However, if you haven't succeeded in stopping smoking on your own, getting extra support can increase the likelihood that you will quit successfully.

### Benefits of quitting

Quitting at any age will reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic bronchitis and several other health conditions related to smoking. The earlier you quit, the greater the health benefit.

Your health will improve in the first few months after quitting, benefiting your heart and lungs, increasing blood flow to hands and feet and improving your immune system. Although quitting can be initially stressful, after six months your stress levels and mood may be better than when you smoked.

Smokers who quit by the age of 30 gain 10 years of life expectancy and avoid most smoking-related diseases. Even quitting at the age of 60 improves your life expectancy by a few years. If you already have a smoking-related disease, quitting will improve your condition and assist in your treatment.

### Deciding to quit

Motivation and planning are central to quitting smoking. First, work out the main reasons you want to stop. Take a piece of paper – on one half write down the reasons you smoke and on the other half, write down all the reasons you can think of to quit.

Now you have a clearer idea of what you will lose and what you will gain from stopping smoking. Circle the most important reason for you to quit. Write it down on a separate piece of paper and keep it where you can easily look at it when you need to.

If you seem to have more reasons to smoke than quit, you may want to talk to someone about this, such as your doctor or a Quitline advisor.

### Tackling barriers to quitting

Many people keep smoking because they feel it helps them in some way or they are afraid of the possible side effects of quitting. Some common concerns include:

- **Cigarettes as stress relief** – there are plenty of other ways to relax that are actually beneficial to the body, such as exercise and meditation.
- **Fear of weight gain** – the best approach is to focus on how you look and feel physically, rather than your weight. There are things you can do to help keep weight gain low.
- **Fear of depression** – quitting cigarettes can often make a person feel better about themselves and in control. For people with a mental illness or who have had a mental illness, special support is available through your doctor and the Quitline.
- **Fear of withdrawal** – nicotine is an addictive drug and the effects of withdrawal can be unpleasant. However, these symptoms are only temporary and using quitting medications can lessen the effects.

## Tips on quitting

Suggestions include:

- Decide on a quit date and stick to it.
- Ring Quitline on 13 7848. For the cost of a local call, professional telephone advisors provide advice, encouragement and support to help smokers quit.
- The Quitline also provides a 'call back' service, information on Quit courses, a free Quit pack and information on video, DVD, CD, audio tape or the Internet.
- Tell your family and friends of your intention to stop smoking and ask for their support.
- Think about prior attempts to quit and what went wrong. Plan how to avoid the same pitfalls this time.
- Decide on your strategy. For example, do you intend to go cold turkey, use nicotine replacement therapy or attend group courses?
- Write a list of all the reasons why you want to stop smoking and refer to this list whenever you feel tempted to light up a cigarette.
- Throw away all cigarettes, lighters and ashtrays in your home and car. If your partner smokes, suggest that he or she stops too or only smokes outside the house and away from you.
- Plan for situations that you know make you want to smoke.
- Reduce possible weight gain by eating more fruit, vegetables and wholemeal cereals and consuming less fat and alcohol. Do some exercise you enjoy, such as walking or swimming.
- Your body will absorb more caffeine than usual in the few weeks after quitting. Cut down on coffee and tea for the first month or so to prevent caffeine-induced anxiety and restlessness.
- Treat yourself with the money you have saved. Your efforts deserve to be rewarded!
- If you do have a cigarette, it's not the end of your quit attempt. A slip-up is a setback, not a defeat.

## Dealing with cravings

Cravings only last a few minutes. Get through them by using the 4Ds:

- **Delay** acting on the urge to reach for a cigarette.
- Take **deep** breaths.
- **Drink** water.
- **Do** something else to occupy your mind while your craving passes.

## Withdrawal

Nicotine is the addictive substance in cigarettes that makes smokers want to keep on smoking. Withdrawal symptoms are the way your body reacts when it stops getting nicotine and all the other chemicals in tobacco smoke.

'Cold turkey' means suddenly stopping smoking without help. This is a popular quitting strategy but it doesn't work for everyone. Some people are so irritated by the associated withdrawal symptoms that they start smoking again.

## Nicotine replacement therapy

There is a range of products that can ease the withdrawal symptoms when you stop smoking and increase your chances of success. These include nicotine skin patches, chewing gum, lozenges, tablets and inhalers. These products are available over the counter from pharmacists and some are available at supermarkets. Nicotine patches are now available at a reduced cost through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

## Prescription drugs

The prescription drugs bupropion (brand names Zyban SR and Prexaton) and varenicline (brand name Champix) can also reduce some nicotine withdrawal symptoms. Together with counselling, these drugs can increase your chances of stopping smoking. These drugs are approved by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). They must be prescribed by your doctor as they are not suitable for everyone and can trigger strong side effects in a small number of people.

It is important that you read all of the Consumer Medicine Information that comes with the medications and talk to your doctor about any symptoms that worry you. This information is printed for you at the pharmacy when the prescription is being filled.

## Stop smoking courses

There are courses available to help and encourage smokers to quit. Participating in a Quit Fresh Start course can increase your chances of successfully quitting. Call Quitline for more information and referral.

There are other smoking cessation (stop smoking) courses available. When you consider these courses, take note of the following suggestions.

- Full details of the course should be made available before you sign up and pay your money. These should include cost, length of sessions, duration and techniques used.
- Follow-up advice and information should be available after the course finishes.
- The course should make no guarantees about its success rate. To have a reasonable success rate, approximately 70 per cent of participants should stop smoking by the end of the course and at least 15 per cent remain non-smokers one year later.
- If claims such as no weight gain, anxiety or withdrawal symptoms seem too good to be true, they probably are.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your pharmacist
- Quitline Tel. 13 7848 (13 QUIT)

## Things to remember

- About 81 per cent of Victorian smokers have tried to stop at least once, while around 40 per cent try to quit each year.
- Quitting can take a number of attempts.
- Helpful strategies include nicotine replacement therapy, getting advice and support from a trained quitting advisor or attending a stop-smoking course.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Quit

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