

How Can I Quit Smoking?

What if I go back to old habits?

Smoking cigarettes tops the list as the most important preventable major risk factor of our No. 1 killer — heart and blood vessel disease. The long list of diseases and deaths due to smoking is frightening. Smoking also harms thousands of nonsmokers, including infants and children, who are exposed to cigarette smoke.

If you smoke, you have good reason to worry about its effect on your health, your loved ones and others. You could become one of the more than 440,000 smoking-related deaths every year. When you quit, you reduce that risk tremendously!



Is it too late to quit?

No matter how much or how long you've smoked, when you quit smoking, your risk of heart disease and stroke starts to drop. In time your risk will be about the same as if you'd never smoked!

How do I quit?

Step One

- List your reasons to quit and read them several times a day.
- Wrap your cigarette pack with paper and rubber bands. Each time you smoke, write down the time of day, how you feel, and how important that cigarette is to you on a scale of 1 to 5.
- Rewrap the pack.

Step Two

- Keep reading your list of reasons and add to it if you can.
- Don't carry matches, and keep your cigarettes out of easy reach.
- Each day, try to smoke fewer cigarettes, and try not to smoke the ones that aren't most important.

Step Three

- Continue with Step Two. Set a target date to quit.
- Don't buy a new pack until you finish the one you're smoking.
- Try to stop for 48 hours at one time.

Step Four

- Quit smoking completely. Throw out all cigarettes and matches. Hide lighters and ashtrays.
- Stay busy! Go to the movies, exercise, take long walks, go bike riding.
- Avoid situations and "triggers" you relate with smoking.
- Find healthy substitutes for smoking.

- Carry sugarless gum or artificially sweetened mints. Munch carrots or celery sticks. Try doing crafts or other things with your hands.
- Do deep breathing exercises when you get the urge.

What if I smoke after quitting?

It's hard to stay a nonsmoker once you've had a cigarette, so do everything you can to avoid that "one." The urge to smoke will pass. The first 2 to 5 minutes will be the toughest. If you do smoke after quitting:

- This doesn't mean you're a smoker again — do something now to get back on track.
- Don't punish or blame yourself — tell yourself you're still a nonsmoker.
- Think about why you smoked and decide what to do differently the next time.
- Sign a contract to stay a nonsmoker.

What happens after I quit?

- Your senses of smell and taste come back.
- Your smoker's cough goes away.
- Your digestive system returns to normal.
- You feel alive and full of energy.
- You breathe much easier.
- It's easier to climb stairs.
- You're free from the mess, smell and burns in clothing.
- You feel free of "needing" cigarettes.
- You'll live longer and have less chance of heart disease, stroke, lung disease and cancer.

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

Do you have questions or comments for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

When will the urges stop?

How can I keep from gaining weight?

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at americanheart.org/statistics.

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How Can I Handle the Stress of Not Smoking?

No one says that quitting smoking is easy. But everyone says it's worth it! Quitting will drastically reduce your risk of developing heart and blood vessel diseases — diseases that kill someone every 36 seconds. It will also lower your chance of having lung disease and cancer. Most of all, quitting can save your life and the lives of nonsmokers around you.

No matter how much or how long you've smoked, when you quit your risk of heart disease goes down. In fact, only three years after quitting, your risk of heart disease is almost the same as if you'd never smoked!



How can I cope with the urge?

- Write down the reasons why you quit and look at the list often.
- Don't talk yourself into smoking again. When you feel an urge to have "just one," stop yourself. Think of what triggered you, and find a different way to handle it. For example, if you feel nervous and think you need a cigarette, realize that you could take a walk to calm down instead.
- Be prepared for times when you'll get the urge. If you smoke when drinking, cut down on alcohol so you don't weaken your promise to yourself.
- Change your habits. Instead of having a cigarette after dinner, brush your teeth or walk the dog.
- Go where smoking isn't allowed. In restaurants ask to be seated in the nonsmoking section.
- Stick around people who don't smoke. Ask for support and find a buddy you can call when you feel weak. Tell others they can help you by not giving you a cigarette and by being supportive.
- Reward yourself each time you get through a day or week without smoking. Treat yourself to a movie. Or figure out how much money you've saved and buy yourself something special.

How can I relax?

- Try deep breathing. Take a long, deep breath, count to 10 and release it. Repeat five times and you'll feel much more relaxed.
- Allow 20 minutes a day to let go of tension this way: Close your eyes, relax your muscles and think hard about one word, like "calm." Say it until you reach a state of relaxation.
- Think positive thoughts! Focus on how great it is that you've stopped smoking, how food tastes better and how nice it is not to wake up coughing. Remind yourself how smoking stinks, stains your teeth and gives you bad breath.
- Listen to relaxation audiotapes.

How can physical activity help?

- Walking and other exercise releases stress and calms you.
- It can improve your mood.
- It keeps your mind off cigarettes.
- It can help control your appetite.
- It can help you lose weight if you're overweight, or stay at a normal weight.
- It can lower your blood pressure level.
- It can increase your "good" blood lipid level.
- It can help reduce your risk of developing heart disease and stroke.
- It can help control blood sugar by improving how your body uses insulin.

How can I learn more?

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2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.
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Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

How long will the cravings last?

What about nicotine gum?

What about the nicotine patch?

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How Can I Avoid Weight Gain When I Stop Smoking?

Quitting smoking doesn't mean you'll automatically gain weight. And even if you do gain a couple pounds, that's not as important as saving your life... and the lives of others. When people gain weight, it's usually because they start to eat more once they quit smoking. If you watch what you eat and stay physically active, you may not gain at all!



What should I eat and drink?

- Plenty of fruits and vegetables (at least 8–10 servings a day).
- Whole-grain cereals, pastas and breads.
- Fat-free or low-fat snacks like pretzels.
- Sugar-free hard candy.
- Foods low in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol. Read food labels and choose healthful options.
- Drink lots of water! Cut back on alcohol and drinks with caffeine (coffee, tea and soft drinks)

How can physical activity help?

- Walking and other exercise releases stress and calms you.
- It can help control your appetite.
- It can improve your mood.
- It burns calories and can help you lose weight if you take in fewer calories than you use up.
- It can help you stay at a healthy weight.

What are good activities to help keep weight off?

Becoming more active can help you reduce or maintain your weight. Try any of the following. Check with your doctor first if you've been inactive a long time or have medical problems, you're middle-aged or older, and you plan a vigorous exercise program.

- Walk in your neighborhood or at indoor shopping malls.
- Do gardening or yard work.
- Take stairs instead of escalators and elevators.
- Park farther from stores and walk.
- Learn a new dance.
- Ride a bicycle.
- Try aerobic dance classes or use a videotape at home.

What can I do instead of smoking?

- Play with a pencil, paper clip or marbles.
- Munch on carrots, apples, celery and sugarless gum.
- Brush your teeth often and keep a fresh taste in your mouth.
- Keep your hands busy — wash the car, garden, knit, do crossword puzzles, write letters, cook.
- Try a new sport.
- Get plenty of rest and physical activity.

What else can I do?

- Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing or meditation.
- Think positive thoughts! Feel proud about quitting.
- Write down why you're quitting and read it.
- Spend time with other nonsmokers.
- Go where there's no smoking, like stores, movies, churches and libraries.
- Reward yourself every day or week that you stay a nonsmoker. Don't use food as a reward.

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
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How do I read food labels?
