

Smoking tobacco is deadly

Tobacco smoking is the single largest cause of preventable illness and death in Australia. Smoking causes a range of cancers, as well as heart disease, stroke and emphysema.

Every year, smoking causes around 3,940 deaths in Victoria. Compared to other causes of death for Victorians, on average:

- Smoking tobacco kills 76 Victorians every week.
- Alcohol kills 15 Victorians every week.
- Road accidents kill eight Victorians every week.
- Illicit drugs kill two Victorians every week.

One in two lifetime smokers die from smoking

Tobacco causes more illness and death than any other drug. In Australia, more than 14,900 people died from diseases caused by smoking in the financial year 2004–05. This is about 89 per cent of all drug-caused deaths. One in two lifetime smokers will die from their habit, half of those in middle age.

A Victorian survey shows that 18 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women aged 18 years and over smoked in 2010.

Chemicals in tobacco

Tobacco smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals, including:

- Tar – a mixture of chemicals
- Nicotine – an addictive substance
- Carbon monoxide – found in car exhaust fumes
- Ammonia – found in floor cleaner
- Arsenic – found in ant poison.

At least 69 of the chemicals in tobacco smoke are known to cause cancer.

Chemicals in tobacco

Smoking causes cancer of the lung, throat, mouth, nose, voice box, oesophagus, pancreas, liver, stomach, kidney, bladder, ureter, bowel, ovary, cervix and bone marrow (myeloid leukemia). Tobacco smoke also causes heart disease, stroke and emphysema.

Smoking and cancer

Nicotine, which occurs naturally in tobacco plants, is the drug that makes smokers want to keep on smoking. Research has shown that, like heroin, nicotine is addictive. This means that when people start smoking regularly, they usually become dependent on tobacco. After a while, the body becomes used to nicotine and needs a regular dose.

Withdrawal symptoms from smoking

One reason that smokers continue to smoke is to avoid withdrawal symptoms, which can be very unpleasant. Withdrawal can bring about physical and emotional changes, which may include:

- Cravings

- Irritability, frustration, depression and/or anxiety
- Restlessness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changed sleeping patterns
- Increase in appetite and weight gain.

Withdrawal symptoms are all signs that the body is recovering and getting used to living without nicotine. On average, most symptoms are gone within two to four weeks. Heavy smokers may have some symptoms for a few more weeks.

Most smokers want to quit

Research shows that most smokers have tried to quit. They are aware of the health problems caused by smoking for themselves and the people around them.

Smokers also realise they spend a lot of money on cigarettes.

It is important for a smoker to decide they want to quit and be confident that they will succeed. The next step is to plan the best way to do it. A smoker might find it useful to think about why and when they smoke and then work out ways to tackle the urge to smoke.

Help for smokers to quit

Help is available for smokers who want to quit. Some things that can help include:

- Counselling or coaching
- Education and information
- Nicotine patches, gum, inhaler, lozenges and tablets
- Prescription medicines such as bupropion (brand names Zyban, and Prexaton) and varenicline (Champix).

People who have the best chance of quitting are those who get some coaching **and** use quitting medications. Talk to your doctor about the type of help that is best for you. Quitting medications are not suitable for everyone.

Most smokers try to quit several times before they manage to quit for good. To have a cigarette does not mean failure. A person can learn from a setback and succeed the next time.

Where to get help

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

Things to remember

- Tobacco smoking is the single largest cause of preventable death and illness in Australia.
- Nicotine is a naturally occurring drug in tobacco that makes cigarette smoking addictive.
- Many smokers try to quit several times before they manage to quit for good.

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

Quit

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