
What to expect when you quit smoking

Summary

- Quitting smoking is the best thing you will ever do for your health.
 - Withdrawal can be challenging, but it can help if you look at the symptoms as signs that your body is recovering.
 - Common symptoms include: cravings, restlessness, trouble concentrating or sleeping, irritability, anxiety, increases in appetite and weight gain.
 - Many people find withdrawal symptoms disappear completely after two to four weeks.
 - Quitline is available to help you quit, 8am – 8pm, Monday to Friday.
 - Changing your routine can help avoid those triggers that tell your brain it's time for a smoke.
 - Nicotine replacement therapy products or medication can help you quit smoking.
-

When you decide to quit smoking, it can help to find out what to expect as you work through the process. Some people have only a few mild symptoms when they quit but others find it harder.

While withdrawal can be challenging, it can help if you look at the symptoms as signs that your body is recovering from the damage smoking has caused.

Many people find withdrawal symptoms disappear completely after two to four weeks, although for some people they may last longer. Symptoms tend to come and go over that time. Remember, it will pass, and you will feel better if you hang on and quit for good.

Symptoms when you quit smoking

Common symptoms you may experience during your recovery include:

- cravings – these may be strong at first, but they usually only last a few minutes. If you resist each one they will get less powerful in time
- restlessness and trouble concentrating or sleeping – these will pass as your body gets used to not smoking. Relaxation and deep breathing can help. It's also a good idea to reduce your caffeine intake because when you quit smoking your body absorbs almost twice as much caffeine as usual, which can leave you feeling anxious, irritable and restless
- irritability, anger, anxiety, depressed mood – this is all normal: don't panic. Just accept that you will be emotional for a while and that it will pass
- increase in appetite and weight gain – this may last several weeks. Planning ahead can help. Better Health Channel has tips on [managing weight gain when you quit](#).

Less common symptoms you may experience – which will also pass – include:

- cold symptoms such as coughing, sore throat and sneezing
- constipation
- dizziness or light-headedness
- mouth ulcers.

As time passes, you will find these symptoms grow weaker, and you will think about smoking less. If you have severe or long-lasting symptoms, it might help to discuss them with a health professional or a [Quitline](#) Specialist.

It might also help to use [nicotine replacement therapy products](#) or [quitting medication](#). For more tips go to [Craving a Cigarette Right Now?](#)

Feeling emotional when you quit

In the first days and weeks when you quit smoking, the emotional ups and downs could feel like a rollercoaster ride. Making big changes in your life can naturally lead to heightened emotions.

Some people describe giving up smoking as feeling like you're losing a friend. As long as you understand that this is just a stage and what you're feeling is normal, you can ride through the hard times and settle into feeling more confident without cigarettes.

Knowing how quickly you will recover with quitting can help:

- **Within six hours** your heart rate will slow and your blood pressure will become more stable.
- **Within one day** your bloodstream will be almost nicotine free, the level of carbon monoxide in your blood will have dropped, and oxygen will be reaching your heart and muscles more easily.
- **Within one week** your sense of taste and smell may have improved.
- **Within three months** you will be coughing and wheezing less, your immune function and circulation to your hands and feet will be improving, and your lungs will be getting better at removing mucus, tar and dust.
- **Within six months** your stress levels are likely to have dropped, and you are less likely to be coughing up phlegm.
- **After one year** your lungs will be healthier and breathing will be easier than if you'd kept smoking.
- **Within two to five years** your risk of heart disease will have dropped significantly (and will continue to do so over time).
- **Within five years**, a woman's risk of cervical cancer will be the same as if she had never smoked.
- **After 10 years** your risk of lung cancer will be lower than if you had kept smoking.
- **After 15 years** your risk of heart attack and stroke will be similar to that of someone who has never smoked.

Weight gain and quitting smoking

Weight gain is not always part of quitting smoking but it is common. You may find you feel hungrier than usual after you quit – this is a common withdrawal symptom and it will settle down with time. It can help to plan ahead and have plenty of healthy snacks in the kitchen, such as nuts and fruit, and to get rid of the junk food from your house.

If you do **gain weight** in the early days, try not to be too hard on yourself. By quitting smoking you're doing great things for your health.

Managing smoking withdrawal symptoms

Although withdrawal symptoms can feel challenging, there are ways you can help yourself stay motivated:

- Keep a list of reasons you have decided to quit and keep it handy for those moments when you're tempted to smoke.
- Make plans and stay busy.
- Engage friends and family to help distract you from your cravings and keep you motivated.
- Remember the **four Ds**:
 - delay acting on the craving for five minutes and it will usually pass
 - do some deep breathing
 - drink water, or
 - do something else.

Routines to help you manage cravings

One of the biggest challenges many people face in the early days of quitting is the regular cravings. Some cravings are your body physically wanting nicotine, but some are also related to your daily routines.

Changing your routine can help avoid those triggers that tell your brain it's time for a smoke.

Here are some ideas for activities to do instead of smoking at those times you usually reach for the cigarettes:

- first thing in the morning – have a shower
- with coffee or tea – change to a different drink, a different cup, or change where you drink it

- at morning tea – sit in a different place or with different people, read a magazine or take a scroll through your social media
- at the computer at home – move your desk or redecorate to change the look
- after a meal – go for a walk
- after work – exercise or meditate
- before dinner – make your dinner time earlier
- with alcohol – change to a different type of drink or hold your drink in your smoking hand
- as you plan your next task – breathe deeply
- as a reward – listen to music or have a piece of fruit
- when you're with another smoker – chew gum or bring a water bottle
- in front of the television – move the furniture around, hold a stress ball, do some easy stretches
- before bed – have a warm drink or read a book.

Remember, each time you resist that urge and do something else instead it's a victory in your quest to quit: you're helping your brain break that link between the activity and the cigarette.

The more options you have to distract yourself, the better. Here are a few more ideas you can try at any time:

- Sip a glass of water slowly.
- Play with a pet.
- Call a friend.
- Play a game on your phone.
- Ask your partner or a friend for a shoulder massage.
- Try some gardening.
- Put on some hand cream.
- Do a jigsaw puzzle or crossword.
- Peel an orange.
- Think about the reasons you're quitting and envision a positive future.

Managing stress when you quit smoking

It will take time to settle into new routines and find **new ways to deal with stress** now that smoking is not an option.

The stress-release you feel when you have a cigarette is only temporary. It doesn't solve your problems, it only shifts your focus and feeds the **smoking stress-cycle**.

Research tells us that smokers tend to have higher stress levels than non-smokers. Most people find that their stress levels are lower six months after quitting than they were before they quit.

One of the biggest challenges you'll face when you quit is finding a new way to take 'me time' – at work, when you first get home, after dinner, and other times when you just need some time out.

You might find it helpful to create a special space for yourself to relax. Or you could try revisiting an old hobby or starting a new one.

See **How to deal with stress when you quit** for ideas on great time-out activities.

Costs of smoking

There is no point dwelling on the amount of money you have already spent on smoking. But you could still **save money if you quit**, and the sooner you quit, the more money you will save.

If you smoke a pack of 20 cigarettes a day at \$27, you will save around \$10,000 a year. Thinking about what else you would like to do with that money can be a great motivator to stick to your quit plan.

Try this cost **calculator** to see how much you can save by giving up smoking.

Benefits of quitting smoking

betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Quitting is the best thing you will ever do for your health. It can affect your life in ways you may not even imagine.

Benefits to your health and life from quitting smoking include:

- Your sense of taste and smell may improve, so you may enjoy your food more.
- Exercising to increase your fitness will become easier.
- You will be free from the hassles of smoking, such as smelling of smoke, or always having to make sure you have enough cigarettes.
- Your **fertility levels will improve** (in both men and women), and if you're a woman, your chances of having a healthy pregnancy and baby will also increase.
- You will save thousands of dollars a year that you can save or spend on other things.

Your family and friends will also benefit because:

- you won't put their health at risk with **second-hand smoke** any more
- your children will be less at risk from bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma, meningitis and ear infections.

If you start smoking again

If you slip and have a cigarette, don't use it as an excuse to go back to smoking.

Remove yourself from the situation. Go for a walk, take a deep breath or have a drink of water, and ask yourself if you really want to be a smoker again. Try not to waste your energy on self-blame. Instead, treat your slip-up as a sign to revise your quitting strategy.

If you've tried several times to give up smoking and you haven't succeeded yet, don't lose hope. It's common for people to try to quit a number of times before they stop smoking for good.

Next time you quit, spend some time thinking about what has worked for you in the past, and what challenges caused you to relapse. Then make plans for what you will do this time when those temptations come up again.

Help is available to quit

If you could do with a hand, **talk to your doctor** or **pharmacist** about options to help you quit, or call **Quitline** for advice and support. You don't have to do this alone. And willpower is not the only tool at your disposal – you can buy **nicotine patches** and **quitting medications** more cheaply with a script from your doctor.

You might also like to try **QuitCoach**. QuitCoach is a program that asks you questions about your smoking and uses your answers to give you personalised advice. Each time you visit the site it asks you relevant questions for your situation and provides updated advice based on your answers.

QuitCoach can be especially useful in helping you decide what quitting aid – such as a nicotine replacement therapy product or medication – could be right for you.

For more information see **Quitting tips** and **Quitting methods**.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Your **pharmacist**
- **Quitline** Tel. **13 78 48**, 8am – 8pm, Monday to Friday
- **QuitCoach**
- **QuitTxt**

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

Quit

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2019 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.