
Smoking kills

Summary

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

Many people die from smoking

Tobacco causes more illness and death than any other drug. In Australia, smoking kills around 18,800 people every year. This is estimated to be about 70 per cent of all deaths from tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Up to two in three people who smoke throughout their lifetime will die from their habit, and they will die on average 10 years earlier than people who do not smoke.

In Victoria, smoking causes around 4,400 deaths every year – an average of 85 deaths per week.

A survey of Victorians shows that 14 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women aged 18 years and over smoked daily in 2015.

Smoking laws in Victoria

In Victoria, it is illegal to smoke or use electronic cigarettes:

- in most indoor workplaces
- in cars carrying children who are under 18 years of age
- at all of Victoria's patrolled beaches within 50 metres of a red and yellow flag
- within 10 metres of children's playground equipment
- within 10 metres of skate parks
- within the outdoor areas of all public swimming pool complexes
- within 10 metres of outdoor sporting venues during under 18s events
- at under 18s functions
- on public transport and in all areas of train stations, covered bus shelters and raised platform tram stops
- within the grounds of, and within four metres of an entrance to, all Victorian childcare centres, kindergartens (or preschools) and primary and secondary schools
- at and within four metres of an entrance to children's indoor play centres and Victorian public premises (which are all public hospitals and registered community health centres, and certain Victorian Government buildings)
- in all outdoor dining areas where food (other than pre-packaged food or uncut fruit) is provided on a commercial basis
- at certain food fairs and organised events
- in prisons, including outdoor areas.

Chemicals in tobacco smoke

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

- tar – a mixture of chemicals
 - nicotine – an addictive substance
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- carbon monoxide – found in car exhaust fumes
- ammonia – found in floor cleaner
- arsenic – found in ant poison.

At least 70 of the chemicals in tobacco smoke are known to cause cancer.

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 leukaemia). Tobacco smoke also causes heart disease, stroke and emphysema.

Withdrawal from smoking

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

One reason that people 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 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, but some people may have some symptoms for a few more weeks. Some people may gain weight, particularly in the first few months, but this decreases with time.

Better Health Channel has more information about what to **expect when you quit smoking**.

Most people who smoke want to quit

Research shows that most people who smoke have tried to quit. They are aware of the health problems caused by smoking, for themselves and for the people around them, and realise they spend a lot of money on cigarettes.

Seek help if you want to quit smoking

Help is available if you want to quit smoking. Some things that can help include:

- counselling or support – for example, your doctor or **Quitline**.
- education and information – available from **Quit** and **QuitTxt**.
- nicotine patches, gum, inhalators, lozenges, and mouth spray
- prescription medication such as bupropion (Zyban) and varenicline (Champix).

People who have the best chance of quitting are those who get some support and use nicotine replacement products or quitting medication. Talk to your doctor about the type of help that is best for you. Medication used to quit smoking is not suitable for everyone.

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

Where to get help

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

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

Quit

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