

# Quitting Smoking

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[Overview](#) [Resources](#)

If you smoke, quitting smoking is the most important step you can take to protect your lungs. It is NEVER too late to quit. Your doctor can help you decide which smoking cessation method will work best for you.

## Why should I quit?

You've probably heard how smoking can be harmful. Here's some ways quitting can be helpful. If you quit, you will:

- Prolong your life
- Improve your health (Smoking increases your risk of [lung cancer](#), [throat cancer](#), [emphysema](#), heart disease, [high blood pressure](#), [ulcers](#), [gum disease](#) and other conditions.)
- Feel healthier (Smoking can cause coughing, poor athletic ability and sore throats.)
- Look better (Smoking can cause face wrinkles, stained teeth and dull skin.)
- Improve your sense of taste and smell
- Save money

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## How can I quit?

There's no one way to quit that works for everyone. A smoking cessation program may be helpful to you. Ask your healthcare provider about smoking cessation programs in your community.

Before you quit all at once ("cold turkey"), setting a plan will help:

- Pick a date to stop smoking and then get ready for it.
- Record when and why you smoke. You will come to know what triggers your urges to smoke.
- Record what you do when you smoke. As you plan to stop, try smoking at different times and different places to break the connections between smoking and certain activities.
- List your reasons for quitting. Read over the list before and after you quit.
- Find activities to replace smoking. Be ready to do something else when you want to smoke.
- Ask your healthcare provider about using [nicotine gum and patches](#). Some people find these aids are very helpful. Also ask your doctor about a nicotine-free prescription medication (for example, [Chantix](#)® or [Zyban](#)®) that can help you quit smoking.

## What to do when you quit?

- On the day you pick to quit, start that morning without a cigarette.
- Don't focus on what you are missing. Think about what you are gaining. (See the section below, "What Happens When You Quit.")
- Tell yourself you are a great person for quitting. Remind yourself of this when you want a smoke.
- When you get the urge to smoke, take a deep breath. Hold it for 10 seconds, then release it slowly.
- Keep your hands busy. Doodle, play a sport, knit or work on a computer.
- Change activities that were connected to smoking. Take a walk or read a book instead of taking a cigarette break.
- Don't carry a lighter, matches or cigarettes.
- Go to places that don't allow smoking, such as museums and libraries.
- Eat low-calorie, healthy foods when the urge to smoke strikes. Carrot and celery sticks, fresh fruits and fat-free snacks are good choices.
- Drink a lot of fluids. Cut down on [alcohol](#) and [caffeine](#). They can trigger urges to smoke. Select water, herbal teas, caffeine-free soft drinks and juices.
- Exercise. [Exercising](#) will help you relax.
- Hang out with non-smokers.
- Get support for quitting. Tell others about your milestones with pride.

## What happens when you quit?

After 20 minutes

- You stop polluting the air
- Your blood pressure and pulse decrease
- The temperature of your hands and feet increases

After 8 hours

- The carbon monoxide level in your blood returns to normal
- Oxygen levels in your blood increase

After 24 hours

- Your chance of heart attack decreases

After 48 hours

- Nerve endings adjust to the absence of nicotine
- Your ability to taste and smell begin to return

After 72 hours

- Bronchial tubes relax

After 2 weeks to 3 months

- Your circulation improves
- Your exercise tolerance improves

After 1 to 9 months

- Coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue and shortness of breath decrease
- Cilia re-grow, increasing the ability of the lungs to handle mucus, clean the lungs and reduce infection
- Your overall energy level increases

After 1 year

- Your risk of heart disease decreases to half that of a current smoker

After 5 years

- Your risk of [stroke](#) is reduced to that of people who have never smoked

After 10 years

- Risk of dying from lung cancer drops to almost the same rate as a lifelong NON-smoker
- The incidence of other cancers - of the mouth, larynx, esophagus, [bladder](#), kidney and pancreas - decreases

### **More good news: Quitting smoking improves your ability to breathe!**

Even nonsmokers experience a decrease in lung capacity (the volume of air you are able to take in and forcibly exhale in one second) with age. However, you can minimize the impact by quitting smoking. If you want to breathe easier, the earlier you quit, the more lung capacity you will retain — here are some facts: If you are a smoker who has smoked an average of 30 cigarettes a day beginning at age 25, your lung capacity could decrease slightly more than a nonsmoker and would be below the average capacity of a nonsmoker by the time you turn 40. Furthermore, if you are a smoker who is at risk for [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#) (a lung disease), your lung capacity can decrease rapidly by age 65, at which point you will likely be frequently short of breath.

### **How will I feel when I quit?**

You may crave cigarettes, feel very hungry, cough often, get [headaches](#), have difficulty concentrating, have [constipation](#), feel very tired, have a sore throat or have difficulty sleeping. Although withdrawal symptoms will be the strongest when you first quit, they should go away within a few weeks.

### **I've tried quitting before, but it didn't work. What can I do?**

To quit smoking, you must be ready emotionally and mentally. Some people are more ready to quit than others. Look at these five stages of change.

**Stage one: Pre-contemplation:** The person does not want to quit smoking but may try to quit because he or she feels pressured.

**Stage two: Contemplation:** The person wants to quit someday. He or she has not taken steps to quit, but wants to quit.

**Stage three: Preparation:** The person takes small steps to quit such as cutting back on smoking or switching to a lighter brand.

**Stage four: Action:** The person puts a plan for quitting into action. He or she makes changes in his or her actions and environment to help cope with urges to smoke. The person copes with urges to smoke by following the plan and remains smoke-free for six months.

**Stage five: Maintenance:** The person has not smoked for one year. Smoking again (relapse) is common; 75 percent of those who quit, smoke again. Most smokers have tried three times before successfully quitting. Don't give up!

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### [Head & Neck Institute](#)

Our doctors specialize in head and neck cancer, laryngology & tracheal reconstruction, nasal & sinus disorders, otology, vestibular & balance disorders and voice box cancer.

References:

- COPD Foundation. [Understanding COPD. Living With COPD. Quitting Smoking](#). Accessed 9/21/2018.
- American Lung Association. [Stop Smoking](#). Accessed 9/21/2018.

*This information is provided by the Cleveland Clinic and is not intended to replace the medical advice of your doctor or healthcare provider. Please consult your healthcare provider for advice about a specific medical condition. This document was last reviewed on: 09/14/2018*