Getting Motivated to Quit Smoking

If you have tried to quit smoking, you know how hard it can be. That's because nicotine is a very addictive drug. Just seconds after you inhale tobacco smoke, nicotine travels to the brain, telling it to release chemicals to make you want to smoke more. Usually people try to quit several times before finally succeeding. The good news is that each time you try, you will be stronger and closer to quitting for good.

Why You Should Quit Smoking
The reasons to keep trying to quit are stronger than ever. Smoking is responsible for large numbers of deaths from cancer, heart attacks, stroke, and lung disease. Low birth weight, premature delivery, respiratory distress syndrome, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) are linked to smoking during pregnancy. Up to 25 percent of all deaths from home fires are from fires that were started by smoking materials.

Lung cancer isn't the only cancer caused by smoking. Others include cancer of the larynx, esophagus, kidneys, pancreas, and stomach. Although many people believe smokeless (chewing) tobacco is less hazardous to your health than cigarettes, it can cause cancer of the mouth. Tobacco of all kinds can cause cancer.

The health benefits of quitting are tremendous. After 5 to 15 years of not smoking, ex-smokers' risks of developing heart and lung diseases, cancer, and lung problems drop to the same levels as if they had never smoked.

Prepare Yourself to Quit
Given the overwhelming evidence that smoking is bad for your health, most smokers want to quit. If you are one of the 47 million people in the United States who smoke, the steps listed later in this article may help you quit. Remember: Anyone can quit, regardless of age, health, or lifestyle.

If you want to stop smoking, start preparing for it today. Set a quit date and stick to it. If you slip, forgive yourself, then get right back to quitting. Your success will be greatly influenced by your desire and determination to quit smoking for good.

When you decide to quit smoking, remember that you may experience symptoms of withdrawal. For heavy smokers, withdrawal may include headaches, constipation, irritability, nervousness, trouble concentrating, or insomnia. Increased coughing may also occur as the cilia (tiny hairs that sweep away irritants from the air passages) in your lungs become active again.

Identifying Your Triggers
For about a week, smoke as you normally would, doing your usual activities. Be aware of every cigarette. Even if you think you know your triggers already, try writing them down in a journal. The results may surprise you. For every cigarette you have, write down the date, time, place, who you're with, why you smoked, and how you felt. When you have enough information to identify your triggers, you can stop journaling. Be honest. Answers may repeat. Review what you've written to form a plan for avoiding the habitual traps in your life.

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Steps to Quit Smoking

• Set your goal. Pick a date on which to stop smoking. Plan to quit completely and for good.

• Take it one day at a time. Focus on making it through today without a cigarette, rather than on how you will go without one for the next week. If you do slip and light up, don't give up. Forgive yourself, and work on resisting the next cigarette.

• Find support. Tell as many as 10 friends that you are quitting. Then take advantage of as much encouragement as they can give you. Also check with your doctor for support. He or she may be able to prescribe a nicotine substitute to help you get through withdrawal symptoms. Organizations such as the American Lung Association and the American Cancer Society offer classes and support groups for people trying to quit smoking.

• Find a substitute. Avoid the temptation to smoke by finding other things to keep your mouth and hands busy. Try sugarless gum, hard candy, or flavored toothpicks. Or try activities such as woodworking, needlework, or playing with fidget toys.

• Be physically active to avoid weight gain. If you're afraid of gaining weight, keep in mind that the average weight gain after quitting smoking is less than 10 pounds. While you are quitting, eat a well-balanced diet and avoid excess calories in sugary or fatty foods, drink six to eight glasses of water a day, and stay physically active. By walking at least 30 minutes a day or doing some other activity, you will ward off excess pounds and ease some of the tension of tobacco withdrawal.

Avoid smoking situations. Go places where smoking isn't allowed. After eating, take a walk or do the dishes instead of lighting up a cigarette. Plan in advance for ways to curb your desire to smoke, such as having sugarless gum or a healthy snack nearby.

• Modify your daily routines or habits if they included smoking. For instance, if your coffee break once meant having a cup of coffee and a cigarette, try walking or reading a book instead.

Maintenance
You made the commitment to quit smoking, and like any other habit, it takes time for the new habit to become a part of you. If you get the urge to smoke, remember how tough it was in the beginning and promise not to put yourself through that again. Write down each temptation and how you coped with it in your journal. This will help you build strategies for coping each time the urge comes back. Think about the joys of being a nonsmoker: better health, clearer breathing, no hacking cough, and a refreshing new sense of smell and taste.

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