

Quitting Smoking: It is Never too late

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1. Quitting smoking is hard. Why should I quit this late in life?

Quitting anytime in life is a good thing. And quitting later in life has its benefits too. The risks for, and affects on, heart disease will be reduced. That “smokers cough” will go away, and you will have more wind to play with grandchildren. The risk for cancer takes 5-10 years to diminish, but who knows how long we will live for sure? Besides, smoking can diminish cancer-fighting treatments. Not buying tobacco products will improve your cash flow. Your house, clothes, car, and even yourself will smell better too.

2. What are the harmful effects of tobacco use?

Cancer risks: Not just lung cancer, but larynx, esophagus, stomach, colon, and even reproductive system cancers are more common in smokers. Quitting improves the body's response to cancer fighting treatments.

Heart disease: Smoking has been a known cause of heart disease since the 1950's. It constricts the blood vessels, increasing the blood pressure, and causes the heart to work harder and faster to circulate the blood. Quitting reduces this risk by 50% at least.

Stroke risk: The increased blood pressure also increases the risk for stroke.

Peripheral vascular disease: Hardening of the arteries is caused or increased by smoking. Quitting improves circulation which improves your ability to exercise, and increases your overall survival rate.

Lung disease: Smoking constantly irritates the delicate lining of the airways and gives the voice a gravelly quality. The constant irritation causes scarring, which causes lung disease. Quitting stops the further progression of chronic lung disease, and as the inflammation heals, lets you breathe easier.

3. What are the benefits of quitting?

Less risk of heart, vascular, and lung disease are the major benefits of quitting smoking. See question #2. No more smoker's cough, and fewer respiratory infections lead to more productive days. Breathing is easier, and you will have more energy. There will be clean air for your family, and a clean smell at home and in your car. You will save money, and there will be no more burn holes in your clothes and upholstery. Your breath will smell better and your complexion takes on a healthier color.

4. Is nicotine really addictive?

Nicotine has a powerful effect on the body, changing mood, alertness, and energy level. These effects are pleasing to the smoker, and therefore reinforce the act of using tobacco. Over time, the body adapts to an expected level of

nicotine in the system, and a “normal state” is achieved only when smoking routinely. Nicotine can be psychologically addicting as well. The tobacco user comes to depend on nicotine to cope with many feelings including stress, discomfort, anger, anxiety, and loneliness. When nicotine is no longer available, the smoker may feel a great sense of loss or even panic that the “trusted friend” is gone.

5. What are the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal?

Here is a list of common nicotine withdrawal symptoms:

- Craving
- Irritability
- Insomnia
- Increased appetite
- Inability to concentrate
- Fatigue
- Constipation, gas, stomach pain
- Coughing

Withdrawal can last for several weeks to several months, with the symptoms the strongest in the first 1-4 days. These can be eased with Nicotine Replacement Products.

6. Aren't nicotine replacement products as harmful as using tobacco?

No! They don't have all the tars and poisonous gasses that are found in cigarettes. They provide less nicotine than a smoker would get from cigarettes. And they are designed to get people off nicotine, not keep them addicted. Smokers who use some form of Nicotine Replacement Product and participate in a behavior change program can double their chances of quitting for good.

7. How do I use Nicotine Replacement Products?

Nicotine Replacement Products quiet the urges from the nicotine receptors in the brain, but lack the other feedback to the user, like handling, taste, smell, and other aspects of tobacco use that are pleasing to the user.

- Nicotine patches-available over-the-counter (without doctor's prescription) in 21,14, and 7 mg strengths. They provide a constant steady nicotine level to soften the urges throughout the day or night. They take effect slowly; so don't expect immediate relief from urges.
- Nicotine gum or lozenges-also over-the-counter in 2 or 4 mg strengths. These take effect within a few minutes, and provide fairly fast relief. Can be used with the patch for intense urges that won't go away with deep breathing or distraction.

- Nicotine inhaler or nose spray-by prescription only. These are also fast-acting products.
- Bupropion (Wellbutrin, Zyban)-non-nicotine prescription antidepressant that works on the nicotine receptors of the brain to soften the urges to smoke.

CAUTION: Never use tobacco products while using nicotine replacement products, as serious health conditions can occur.

These products can be weaned when the quitter is comfortable with their new tobacco free lifestyle, usually in 2-3 months. Then the strength of the NRP should be gradually tapered. If you don't feel comfortable eliminating NRP after 3 months, consult your physician before continuing use.

8. What are some quitting strategies?

A quit date should be set within a couple of weeks of the decision to quit. Many tobacco users find GRADUAL REDUCTION helpful prior to their quit date. This is a method of reducing the number of cigarettes smoked per day, or eliminating places or time of the day when you allow yourself to smoke. Some smokers switch brands to reduce the pleasure found in smoking. These are ways to practice quitting and build the quitter's confidence. The ABRUPT CESSATION is necessary to be successful. The use of nicotine replacement products makes this transition much more comfortable and increases your chance of success.

9. How do I resist the urges to smoke after I quit?

While NRP's are helpful, they are not a "magic pill." Other techniques that are helpful to resist the urge to smoke include:

- Deep breathing
- Go for a walk
- Chew sugarless gum or eat sugarless hard candy
- Work with your hands-sew, knit, crochet, woodworking
- Chew on vegetable sticks
- Brush your teeth
- Squeeze a small rubber ball
- Drink plenty of water
- Work in the yard

Did we mention **deep breathing**? This is very important, as deep breathing is part of the relaxation smokers get from cigarettes. Keep deep breathing, just lose the smoke!

10. Why is relaxation so important?

Since many tobacco users rely on tobacco for relaxation, new ways to relax and handle stress must be developed.

- Relaxation-deep breathing, stretching, make time to be alone, or do something with someone you enjoy
- Problem solving-analyze a problem, and work toward a solution
- Time management-list short- and long-term goals, and schedule daily time according to priorities
- Additional tips-5 minute breaks, neck and should rubs, exercise, limit alcohol, sugar, salt, and caffeine, get plenty of sleep, talk to someone about your feelings

11. If I am not successful quitting on the first try, should I give up?

Of course not! Think about why you lapsed, and determine what you will do differently next time. Then make plans to get back on track ASAP. Remember, 25% of first time quitters have a lapse. Many quitters take 2-5 attempts before they make it for good. A lapse becomes a relapse if you give up trying!

12. Who should I choose for my support system, and why are they important?

You must make the decision to quit smoking for yourself, but you don't have to do it alone. Asking for others' help is a positive part of the process. The first people you may think of for support are family members. You must also consider people with whom you spend most of your day, possibly co-workers. Think also about friends and social contacts who will be willing to help. It will be very helpful if at least one of these support people is a former smoker. We all need suggestions, recognition and encouragement from others.

13. I have been using spit tobacco. Is it as harmful as smoking, and how do I quit that?

Smokeless, or spit tobacco users are also addicted to nicotine, with "normal" levels higher than smokers! The health risks include abrasion of the teeth, gum recession, bone loss around teeth, white pre-cancerous lesions in mouth, oral cancer and cardiovascular disease. Since tobacco juice is sometimes swallowed, digestive system cancers are also more common. Nicotine gum or lozenges are an effective substitute for spit tobacco.

14. I don't want to quit because I will gain weight. How do people avoid weight gain when they quit?

The average weight gain for quitters is 7-10 pounds. If you include a healthy lifestyle, with exercise and healthy eating, with exercise and healthy eating, as

part of your plan, weight gain can be minimized. No matter what your weight is now, you will be healthier with a few extra pounds and without tobacco!