

Using Tobacco: What You Need to Know to Quit

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Why do I need to stop using tobacco?

Cigarettes are the leading cause of preventable deaths in this country. Tobacco is toxic to your body. The nicotine makes your body release adrenaline which causes your blood vessels to constrict and your heart to beat faster. This leads to increased blood pressure, which can lead to heart attacks and strokes. The tars and other substances in tobacco can cause cancer of the lung and other organs. Tars also damage the lungs, leading to emphysema (a serious breathing disorder.)

Why is it so hard to stop smoking?

It seems hard to stop smoking because smoking causes changes in your body and in the way you act. The changes in your body are caused by addiction to nicotine. The changes in the way you act have formed over time as you have bought cigarettes, lit them and smoked them. These changes become your smoking habit. When you have a smoking habit, many things seem to go along with having a cigarette. These might include having a cup of coffee, being stressed or worried, talking on the phone, driving, taking a break at work, having a drink, socializing with friends or wanting to do something with your hands.

How can I stop smoking?

You will have the best chance of stopping if you do these things:

- Use a nicotine replacement product.
- Get support and encouragement.
- Learn how to handle stress and the urge to smoke.
- Use Zyban, if recommended by your doctor.

How do I get ready to stop smoking?

Set a stop date two or four weeks from now. Start keeping a diary now of when and why you smoke to help understand your smoking habit. Using the diary, you and your family doctor can develop a plan to help you deal with the things that make you want to light a cigarette.

What will happen when I stop smoking?

How you feel when you stop smoking depends on how much you smoked, how addicted your body is to nicotine and how ready you are to stop. You may crave a cigarette, and you may be hungrier than usual. You may feel edgy and have trouble concentrating. You may also cough more at first, and you may have headaches. Some people can have mouth sores or stomach upset. These things happen because your body is used to nicotine. These symptoms are strongest during the first few days after quitting, and most symptoms go away in a few weeks.

What is nicotine replacement?

Nicotine replacement products are ways to take in nicotine without smoking. These products come in several forms: gums, patches, inhalers, and nasal spray. Gums and patches can be bought over the counter. Nicotine replacement works by lessening your craving for nicotine and reducing the withdrawal symptoms. It allows you to focus on the changes you need to make in your habits and environment. Once you are more comfortable being a nonsmoker, dealing with your nicotine addiction is easier.

What is Zyban?

Zyban is prescription medicine that can help people increase their chance of success when they quit smoking. It can be used by itself or in combination with nicotine replacement.

How do I get support and encouragement?

Tell your family and friends what kind of support you need. Some people like support from friends and family, while others do not want people to comment. Your family doctor can also recommend stop-smoking programs, like the one that Iliuliuk Family and Health Services offers. The Alaska Tobacco Quit Line –1-888-842-QUIT – provides toll-free, fee-free telephone counseling and support, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Support and encouragement do not have to come from just your family and friends, though. Give yourself personal rewards for stopping smoking. Buy yourself something that you have always wanted, or treat yourself to a dinner or a movie rental.

What about stress and my urges to smoke?

The first few days after stopping will be the hardest. Look back at your smoking diary and see what triggered you to smoke. Then think of other things to do instead of lighting up at these times, such as walking, or simply breathing deeply and slowly. Think of changes in your routine that will help you not to smoke, such as drinking hot tea in the morning instead of coffee (if you used to smoke while you had a cup of coffee).

Will I gain weight when I stop smoking?

Most people gain a few pounds (usually less than 10) after they stop smoking. It is important to know that any weight gain is a minor health risk compared to the risks of continuing to smoke. To limit your weight gain, try not to replace smoking with overeating. Find other ways to keep your hands busy instead of picking up food. Make sure you have healthy, low-fat snacks on hand in case you do reach for food. And start exercising, or exercise more. Exercise helps you burn calories and keeps you busy so that you can not smoke.