

## Quitting smoking.

### Why quit?

Tobacco smoking is the single largest cause of preventable disease in Australia, with over 19,000 tobacco caused deaths per year.<sup>1</sup>

Tobacco smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals<sup>2</sup> including:

- Tar
- Nicotine
- Carbon Monoxide – poisonous gas found in car fumes
- Ammonia – found in floor cleaners
- Arsenic – found in rat poison



### Quitting

Many smokers need to practice quitting several times before they give up for good. The best advice is to keep trying. Practice helps smokers plan what to do next time they get the urge to smoke.<sup>3</sup> The success rate of those who use some form of assistance is double that of those who try to quit on their own.<sup>4</sup>

### Nicotine withdrawal

The symptoms of nicotine withdrawal are usually at their worst in the first 24-48 hours of quitting. Few people experience all the symptoms and they don't all happen at once. The symptoms you might experience are a normal and expected part of quitting smoking. The symptoms will gradually decline in intensity after a couple of weeks.

Withdrawal is your body's response to ridding itself of dependence on nicotine. Some people think of the withdrawal as 'recovery symptoms'. After about two weeks 'recovery symptoms' should be gone. If you have moderate to high nicotine dependence and expect withdrawals, using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) can be helpful.

### Reasons to quit

Quitting smoking at any age results in immediate benefits, including increased life expectancy, provided that the person quits before the development of cancer or other illnesses. Women smokers are faced with a number of additional health problems.

### Approaches to quitting

#### Cold turkey

For many people, going cold turkey is the most successful way of quitting. This means stopping completely without cutting down. Self-help materials are available and help smokers recognise the triggers for smoking. Smokers can call the **Quitline** on **13 QUIT** (13 7848) to receive free resources and free advice.

#### Gradually reducing

This involves delaying the first cigarette of the day by one or two hours each day. A quit date should be set one to two weeks after starting to reduce smoking.<sup>5</sup>

#### Nicotine replacement therapy

Using nicotine gum, patches, lozenges or inhalers may be useful for heavy smokers.<sup>6</sup> A doctor or pharmacist will be able to explain how to use the various products.

### Other pharmacological aids

The prescription drug Zyban has an active ingredient bupropion hydrochloride, which is also in certain antidepressant medications. Zyban can assist smokers to quit but has to be prescribed by a doctor.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

### Alternative methods

While there is often interest in acupuncture, hypnotherapy, herbal and homeopathic preparations there is insufficient evidence on the effectiveness of these methods for quitting.<sup>10</sup>

### Quitting and weight

Many women put off quitting for fear of gaining weight. Although weight gain can be of concern, it is important to remember that remaining a smoker is more of a health risk. Not everyone gains weight after quitting. A sensible eating and exercise plan will assist in avoiding additional weight gain.<sup>11</sup>

### Benefits of quitting

- Nicotine is out of the system in two hours.
- Heart rate and blood pressure drop after six hours.
- Carbon monoxide is out of the system after 12 hours and lung function begins to improve.
- Taste and sense of smell improve after two days.
- Exercising becomes easier and more air gets into the lungs.
- Blood flow to the hands and feet improves after two months.
- After three months the lungs work more efficiently and are able to remove mucus.
- Blood flow to the limbs also improves.
- After 12 months the risk of heart disease is almost half of that of a continuing smoker.
- Stopping smoking reduces the incidence and progression of lung disease including chronic bronchitis and emphysema.
- After quitting smoking for 10 years the risk of lung cancer is less than half that of a continuing smoker.
- After 15 years the risk of heart attack and stroke is almost the same as a person who has never smoked.

### Call the Quitline

The Quitline 13 QUIT (13 7848) is a confidential telephone based service primarily designed to help smokers quit smoking. The Quitline can also provide assistance to the family and friends of smokers and others requesting information about smoking. If you are not fluent in English an interpreter service is available.

By calling the Quitline (for the cost of a local call) you can:

- Be sent a free Quit Pack
- Get help to plan your quit attempt
- Take advantage of talking to specially trained Quitline advisers
- Take part in the free call-back and follow-up service

### References

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