

Quitting Smoking – the first few days.

Taking it easy

Quitting may seem stressful for the first few days. Feelings of irritability or anxiety may be experienced as your body adjusts to being without nicotine.¹ Go easy on yourself. Try to avoid or walk away from situations that cause more stress. Do things that relax you while you're quitting. If you only have time for a short break, then a brief walk and a change of environment may help. Remind yourself that you are now a non-smoker! From your quit day forward, smoking will no longer be just something you shouldn't do, it's something that you won't *want* to do.

Cravings

Cravings are normal and expected. They last only a few minutes and have a beginning, middle and an end. As time passes, your cravings will be less intense, shorter and happen less often. You may like to think of cravings as 'time limited desires'. They can be surfed like a wave and will pass in a few minutes. Some people keep a diary to document how they feel, including the frequency and intensity of their cravings. This may help you to see that things are improving.

If you're experiencing severe cravings, then using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) can be a smart move. It is recommended that you use your NRT (patches, gum, lozenge, sublingual tablet or inhaler) for no less than eight weeks after quitting, as this is the best way to manage withdrawal symptoms and after this period of time you will no longer be addicted to nicotine.

Tingling sensations and dizziness

Some of the aches and pains you experience are signs that your circulation is improving. This is because more of your smaller blood vessels are opening up and your body is adapting to having more oxygen. Tingling in your fingers and toes and dizziness show that the blood circulating through your body has more oxygen in it.



Difficulty concentrating

The physical changes that are happening to your body and cravings for a cigarette may make it more difficult to concentrate.¹ Your body is now receiving more oxygen and will adjust to this in a few days. Complete your tasks or activities in small 'bite-size' chunks. You can do this by taking regular breaks and doing something active during those breaks. Your concentration levels will return to normal in a few weeks time.

Problems falling asleep or frequent waking

Your sleep patterns may be affected as your body withdraws from nicotine.¹ This should ease after about a week. Some people report having unusual or strong dreams, others find that they sleep better. Do something you find relaxing before you go to bed.

Restlessness

Some people feel as though they can't sit still and that they need to move about or do something with their hands.¹ Use this restlessness in a positive way by doing some physical activity that you enjoy.

The problem of empty hands

Not knowing what to do with your hands is a normal experience. Some strategies might be to squeeze a stress ball or to drink water or decaffeinated drinks. You can also carry some healthy foods with you and nibble on them when you are hungry.

Coughing

Coughing means your lungs are getting rid of tar and mucus. Try to think of coughing as your lungs now working better to clean themselves.

Appetite changes

Some people start to feel hungrier once they have quit smoking.¹ This is because nicotine has been reducing their appetite while they have been smoking. You may find that you develop a 'sweet tooth'. It may be helpful to take glucose, which is low in kilojoules and may help to satisfy the desire for sweet foods without resorting to that extra helping of chocolate cake or ice-cream that can add to your body weight. Glucose is available in liquid or tablet form from pharmacies. Diabetics should consult their doctor before using any products containing sugars.

Reduce caffeine intake

As your body is removing nicotine you absorb more caffeine. It is helpful to reduce your intake of tea, coffee and cola drinks by half.² Read the labels on chocolate bars and energy drinks as some of these items also contain caffeine. An increase in caffeine levels may add to your feelings of restlessness or insomnia.

High-risk situations

One idea is to avoid situations where you'll be tempted to smoke. If you can't avoid a high risk situation, think about how you are going to deal with it, eg excuse yourself to go to the bathroom, or get a drink of water. A firm but friendly "No thanks, I'm quitting smoking" is a good thing to practice saying.

Limit alcohol

For people quitting smoking it's a good idea to avoid alcohol for the first two weeks.³ Alcohol tends to lower one's inhibitions, making it more difficult to maintain the determination not to smoke. It's also a common habit to combine a drink and a smoke, so having a drink with friends who smoke may trigger cravings. Instead of meeting for drinks you could suggest an alternative such as the cinema, an outing or another smoke free place, eg a restaurant, a theatre, a bowling alley etc.

Your support network

Remind your friends, family and work mates that you have quit. Their support can help you stay focused. It will help them understand what you're going through.

Reward yourself

Enjoy the rewards that you have included in your quit plan. Celebrate your success. Quitting smoking is the best health investment you can make.

Feel like you might want a cigarette?

A single puff can send you back to smoking. The only way to successfully quit smoking is to not smoke even a part of a cigarette. Think about what you can do instead of having a cigarette. Write a list of all the good things about not smoking or call the Quitline 13 7848 and talk to an adviser.

A final note

The first few days after quitting can be the hardest. However, the long-term benefits of quitting do outweigh the short-term difficulties. Remember all the reasons why you want to quit and reward yourself for the progress you are making. Quitting smoking is the best investment you can make in your health. Stay positive and be kind to yourself!

Call the Quitline 13 QUIT (13 7848)

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

- 1 Hughes JR, Higgins ST, Hatsukami D. (1990) Effects of abstinence from tobacco: A critical review. In: Kozlowski LT, Annis H, Cappell HD, Glaser F, Goodstadt M, Isreal Y, Kalant H, Sellers EM, Vingilis E. (eds) Research Advances in Alcohol and Drug Problems, Volume 10. New York: Plenum Press, pp. 317-398.
- 2 Swanson JA, Lee JW, et al. (1997) The impact of caffeine use on tobacco cessation and withdrawal. Addictive Behaviours. 22(1): 55-68.
- 3 Garvey AJ, Bliss RW, Hitchcock JL et al. (1993) Predictors of smoking relapse among self-quitters: A Report of the Normative Aging Study. Addictive Behaviours. (17):367-377.