

Quit Smoking Before It's Too Late

A Step-by-Step Guide to Quit Smoking

Quitting smoking is the greatest single step a smoker can take to improve his/her health. Smoking is a leading cause of several life threatening diseases, including cancer. People often think, "It will never happen to me," until they develop cancer or have their first heart attack. Cigarettes and tobacco are silent killers that slowly start to take control of our brain and bodies until we become dependent on them.

There is never a perfect time to quit smoking. That moment is 'right now'!

The health benefits of quitting smoking start to surface within minutes. When you kick the habit here is what happens to your body:

Within hours:

- *20 minutes after quitting* – heart rate begins to drop back to a normal level.
- *2 hours after quitting* – blood circulation improves and blood pressure starts to return to normal levels.
- *12 hours after quitting* - the carbon monoxide (found in cigarettes) in your body decreases to lower levels.

Within days:

- *1 day after quitting* – risk of coronary artery disease decreases.
- *2 days after quitting* – sense of smell and taste improve due to regrowth of nerve endings.

Within weeks:

- *2 to 3 weeks after quitting* – improved heart function helps you exercise easily without leaving yourself breathless.

Within a year:

- *9 months after quitting* - decreased coughing and shortness of breath is experienced as your lungs begin to heal.
- *1 year after quitting* – you have reduced risk of heart disease.

In the long run, quitting smoking cuts the risk of lung cancer and other cancers, heart diseases, strokes, and other complications such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema. In addition, ex-smokers have better health than current smokers. An ex-smoker has fewer days of illness, fewer health complaints and lesser upper and lower respiratory tract infections. From an economical point of view, quitting smoking also saves money.

Are you ready to quit?

Remember quitting smoking is not as difficult as many think. The key to a successful quit attempt is a strong will power. Following some simple rules can help a person succeed in quitting smoking.

To quit smoking ask yourself 3 questions:

1. Why do I want to quit smoking?
2. What method will I use to quit smoking?
3. How do I stay smoke-free?

Steps for Quitting

STEP 1: Deciding to quit

Why should you quit? Each smoker has his or her own reasons. Here are four good reasons for you to quit smoking:

- Your family. Your family needs your financial and emotional support. If you become disabled, are unable to work and/or succumb prematurely from smoking-related illness, the emotional and financial security of your family may be in jeopardy.
- Your children. Children exposed to passive smoking at home, are more prone to cold, cough, pneumonia, asthma and ear infections. Children whose parents are smokers lag behind in school and many have behavioural problems. Worse still, if you smoke, your children are more likely to take up this addiction.
- Yourself. You will begin to feel better within a few days of quitting smoking. Your early morning coughing episodes will go away, as well as the bad smell from your clothes and mouth. At the same time your chances of living a longer and healthier life will significantly increase.
- Society. Smoking is a habit that not only harms the smoker but everyone around them, including the family, the co-workers and anyone else who happens to be in the same space as them. These passive smokers are exposed to four times more toxins than smokers, and become victim to the smoker's habits.

STEP II: Preparing to quit

- Choose a quit date. Ideally this date should be within 2 weeks of your decision to quit smoking. The date you choose could be your birthday, or your wedding anniversary. If you are close to Ramadan, and fast during the month, then 1st of Ramadan could be an ideal day.
- Sudden (going cold turkey) versus gradual withdrawal. Those who quit smoking altogether on the quit date have more chances of a successful quit attempt. Gradual withdrawal can work in situations where you have if you have a quit date in mind and gradually reduce your intake as a preparatory measure and stop completely on the quit date.
- Notice when and why you smoke, e.g. while having a cup of tea, driving a car etc., and prepare alternative activities to keep you busy during that time. Tell your friends and family that you are trying to quit smoking. You will need their support. Invite another smoker whom you know to join your quit attempt, so that you can reinforce each other's efforts.
- Change your smoking routine. Keep your cigarettes in a different place. Smoke with your non-dormant hand. Don't do anything else when smoking.
- Avoid situations where you would normally smoke, such as an evening out with friends, or game night. Make alternate plans where the opportunity to smoke does not present itself, such as going to the mall or the cinema.
- When you feel like smoking, wait for a few minutes. Try to think of something else other than smoking. Distract yourself with something, chew a gum or drink a glass of water.
- Visit a doctor who is an expert in smoking cessation methods. He may prescribe you certain medicines to help you quit smoking.

STEP III: Reaching Your quit date

- Get rid of all cigarettes a night before. Put away your ashtrays.
- Carry alternate things to put in your mouth such as a gum, hard candy or a toothpick.
- Celebrate each day you have been without a cigarette. Congratulate yourself for it.
- Go out and enjoy your favourite meal.

STEP IV: Now You Have Stopped Keeping yourself smoke free.

- Do not worry if you feel sleepier or lose your temper easily after quitting; these feelings will pass away in a few days.
- Start exercising. Take walks or ride a bike.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water between meals. The more fluids you drink, the faster the nicotine will flush out of your body.
- When you feel tensed, try to keep busy. Think of ways to solve the problem and tell yourself that smoking will not make it any better.
- Eat regular meals. Feeling hungry is sometimes mistaken for a desire to smoke.
- Avoid places where smokers congregate. When someone offers you a cigarette, say with confidence, "Sorry, I do not smoke."
- If you get a craving for a cigarette, remember the 5 Ds:
 1. Deep breaths (slowly inhale and exhale).
 2. Drink lots of water throughout the day (especially when craving a cigarette).
 3. Do something else to get your mind off the craving. Call a friend, go for walk, or chew on a carrot stick or a gum.
 4. Delay reaching for a cigarette. The urge will soon pass away.
 5. Do not waver: Do not think that just one cigarette would not hurt, it will. The occasional cigarettes will make you crave for more. Do not risk it.
- Pray or meditate. They are a very effective way of relieving stress.

Why is smoking addictive?

For a smoker, the habit of smoking becomes addictive due to the nicotine found in cigarettes. Nicotine is a chemical that has a number of effects on the body including

- Mood elevation,
- Reduced depression,
- reduced irritability,
- a sense of well-being and
- Decreased appetite.

It is due to these effects that nicotine has on the brain that makes quitting smoking difficult.

Will I experience withdrawal symptoms once I quit?

Once a smoker decides to quit and starts upon the quitting regime, he/she may experience withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawal is the set of distressing physical symptoms that occur when one stops using an addictive substance.

The first week after quitting is usually the hardest, and it is important to be aware of these withdrawal symptoms and understand how to manage them:

- *4 hours after quitting* – nicotine cravings kick in. these can be managed by distracting oneself and engaging in a physically exhausting activity.
- *10 hours after quitting* – feelings of restlessness are experienced, along with trouble falling asleep. To tackle these, it is advised to follow bedtime routine and relax. If this does not work, a sleeping pill may be taken.
- *1 day after quitting* – feelings of irritability or agitation over small things. For these, sitting down and breathing deeply may help. It is also advised to avoid things that prove upsetting.
- *2 days after quitting* – headaches and stress. Exercise can help overcome the feelings of distress and restlessness during this phase.
- *3 days after quitting* – the cravings start to subside. To avoid temptation, during the early days, it is important to try and refrain from social or other settings where smoking is encouraged or allowed.
- *A week after quitting* – the symptoms slowly start to subside.

Other symptoms of nicotine withdrawal which may be experienced include:

- Cravings for a cigarette,
- Anxiety, anger and irritability,
- Decreased attention span or
- Difficulty in completing tasks.

Physical withdrawn symptoms may include:

- Headaches
- Increased appetite
- Dizziness
- Constipation
- Fatigue
- Tightness in the chest
- Coughing and an increase in mucus

Withdrawal symptoms peak approximately 3 to 5 days after quitting, and then begin to taper off. It is the first 30 days after quitting which are the most critical and require the most willpower.

Quitting smoking is a marathon than a sprint. It is not a one-time attempt, but a longer effort. Every time you feel the need to smoke, remember the hours you put in to overcome the habit and appreciate yourself for your efforts. Keep yourself away from temptation with the reminder that a single cigarette will undo all the hard work put in quitting smoking. Remember the reasons why you had quit in the first place, and use them to keep yourself motivated to stay away from smoking and/or tobacco. Remember that the process of quitting does not end with the last cigarette. It is a lifelong resolve to stay clean and resist the temptation of smoking again.