

How to Quit Using Tobacco

How will my health improve if I stop using tobacco?

Quitting tobacco has short and long term health benefits. In less than an hour after you quit your blood pressure and circulation improves. In less than a day your carbon monoxide levels drop as your oxygen levels increase. Within a few months your lungs will begin to cleanse themselves and your breathing will improve. In a few years you are at a decreased risk for a heart attack, stroke and cancer. Studies have shown that smoking affects others as well as yourself. Children of parents who smoke around the house are more likely to get respiratory infections than children from nonsmoking homes. Quitting smoking is not easy but it can be done.

What are the first steps to a tobacco-free life?

Set a quit date. Setting a quit date is one of the most important steps in being successful with your quit plan. Pick a date when you will stop tobacco use and mark it on your calendar. Throw away all your lighters, ashtrays, cigarettes, or other tobacco products. If you keep tobacco products around, sooner or later you'll be tempted to use them. Tell your family and friends you plan to quit, and ask for their support and encouragement. Ask them not to offer you cigarettes or other tobacco products, and to not use them when they are around you.

What can I expect when I do stop using tobacco?

In the first 10 days you may feel tired, irritable, and develop headaches or a cough. You may also have problems concentrating, remembering, or sleeping as your body goes through nicotine withdrawal. It is normal to experience withdrawal symptoms, which typically last for only one to two weeks.

How can I lessen withdrawal symptoms?

Consider using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) such as:

- Nicotine patches
- Nicotine gum
- Nicotine lozenges
- Nicotine inhaler
- Nasal spray
- Other pharmacologic therapies such as Wellbutrin® or Chantix®.

Using NRT doubles your chance for a successful quit. By reducing some of the nicotine withdrawal symptoms you are able to concentrate on making the behavioral changes (see below) necessary to help you to reach your goal of becoming tobacco-free.

NRT should be started the morning of your quit date. At that time, discontinue any tobacco use. If you choose to use Wellbutrin or Chantix, begin use at least 7-10 days prior to your quit day, then discontinue all tobacco use. Ask your primary care physician about using any of these medications to help with your quit attempt.

In addition, drink plenty of water, eat several small meals throughout the day, exercise, avoid alcohol and get plenty of rest. Try chewing gum, pretzel sticks, raw fruit or raw vegetables as a substitute for cigarettes or other tobacco products. Take deep breaths, keep busy and reward yourself for not using tobacco. These techniques will also help you to manage nicotine cravings.

What else can I do?

Change your environment.

- Make your car and home tobacco-free.
- Avoid being around others who smoke.

- Avoid places you used to smoke.
- Avoid places you used to purchase tobacco.
- Let others know you have quit tobacco and ask for their support.
- Throw all of your tobacco and tobacco-related items away.

Keep your hands busy.

- Paint, color, draw.
- Build model cars, planes, etc.
- Knit, crochet, needlepoint.
- Jigsaw puzzles, crossword puzzles.
- Join groups or classes that keep you involved in your hobby.

Keep active.

- Join a gym or work out with friends.
- Try something new such as yoga.
- Explore museums, parks, etc.
- Go on more outings with your family or friends.
- Go to a movie.

Join a quit-smoking program.

You may want to join a quit-tobacco program. You will learn about triggers and how to change your thoughts and behaviors for a successful quit. You will also learn how to maintain your tobacco-free lifestyle.

Contact the MHealthy Tobacco Consultation Service at 734-998-6222 for more information about a free program to help UM patients and employees quit tobacco.

How do I prevent relapse?

If you are unable to resist the urge and give in to the temptation to use tobacco, follow these guidelines to keep this slip from turning into a relapse.

- Understand that a slip is different from a relapse. A slip is a minor error or mistake that anyone can make.
- Do not finish the cigarette or tobacco product. Throw out the cigarette, pack of cigarettes, or chew right away. Keeping tobacco products means you are giving yourself permission to use them again.
- Learn from the slip. Review what happened and decide what you can do differently should the same thing happen again.
- Realize that the negative feelings you may have about the slip will pass if you let them. With a little self-awareness, you can refocus and get back on track.
- Have fun with the money you will save by not using tobacco. Make a list of things you would like to buy for yourself or someone else.
- Estimate the cost in terms of packs of cigarettes or cans of chewing tobacco, and put the money aside for something special.

You can do it!

Contact MHealthy Tobacco Consultation Service at
(734) 998-6222 or email: quitsmoking@med.umich.edu for assistance.

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