



Smoking Cessation

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NORTHSTAR COMPASS

*Navigating
Toward Better
Emotional
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A HEALTHY CHOICE

Smoking poses serious health risks. The life expectancy of a smoker is almost 15 years less than it is for a non-smoker. For most smokers, their quality of life is severely compromised long before they succumb to the unpleasant diseases caused by smoking.

Along with the potential health risks, the financial implications of smoking are staggering. The average pack of cigarettes currently hovers around \$8 (much higher in some areas), making the annual cost for a pack-a-day smoker nearly \$3,000. Additional medical care and insurance costs also need to be considered.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Perhaps you have been a smoker for a long time, and question whether quitting now can really make a difference.

The following happen after your last puff:

20 minutes: heart rate and blood pressure drop.

12 hours: carbon monoxide levels in the blood drop to normal.

2 weeks to 3 months: circulation improves and lung function increases.

1 to 9 months: coughing and shortness of breath decrease. The tiny hairs (cilia) that clear mucus from the lungs begin to function normally.

1 year: elevated risk of coronary heart disease is half what it would have been if you had continued to smoke.

2-5 years: risk of having a stroke will decrease to about that of a non-smoker.

5 years: increased risk of mouth, throat, esophagus, and bladder cancer is cut in half. The risk of cervical cancer is reduced to that of a non-smoker.

10 years: risk of dying from lung cancer is about half that of a person who is still smoking. The risk of cancer of the larynx and pancreas also decreases.

15 years: risk of coronary heart disease is the same as a non-smoker.

OTHER BENEFITS:

- Lowers your risk of diabetes
- Your breath, clothes, and hair smell better
- Food tastes better
- Sense of smell returns to normal
- Your fingers and fingernails are no longer yellow

TAKE THE FIRST STEP

If quitting was easy, you and most other smokers would have done it by now. What seemed like harmless fun at one time has now developed into a habit holding you tightly in its grip. The following steps may help:

Step One: Decide to Quit

It may seem like a simple thought, but you will never do it unless you decide you need to. Write a list of all the reasons



you know you should quit. Then list the ways your life would be better if you did. Decide to do it—once and for all, no turning back—and set your mind toward the goal.

Step Two: Set a Quit Date and Start Planning

Give yourself enough time to get your plan together, but not enough time to talk yourself out of it. Quit date:

___/___/___

- Write it down on your calendar and tell your family and friends of your decision.
- Make an appointment with your doctor to discuss the various options and decide on a prescription drug if your doctor recommends one.
- Consider cutting down on one or two cigarettes each day until your quit day arrives.

- Buy some hard candy and/or sugarless gum to help keep your mouth busy when the day arrives.
- Consider signing up for a smoking cessation class for support.
- Avoid rooms that are smoke-filled and plan to wash all your clothes and bedding on that day to minimize exposure to the smells that will trigger your urges to smoke.
- Take a hard look at the habit itself and write down the times and places each day you always have a cigarette. This will help you anticipate the times it will be most difficult to deal with the symptoms of withdrawal.
- Watch out for rationalizations. Below are common thoughts we use to justify our actions:
 - I'll just have a couple puffs.
 - Everybody has to have one vice, right?
 - Lots of other smokers have lived to be 90...
 - Everybody dies of something—why not smoking?
 - Without smoking, life is no fun.
 - I'll wait until tomorrow to quit.
- You can probably add many more. Don't give in to your rationalizations.
- When the urges get particularly unmanageable, decide to delay gratification for just 10 minutes, then another 10 minutes.

Step Three: Expect, Prepare For, and Weather Your Withdrawal Symptoms

Unfortunately, it is not possible to quit without experiencing some adverse symptoms. Some of these strategies may help:

- Change your routines. Perhaps you experience the most trouble at bedtime when you always used to have the last cigarette of the day. Try a new routine at that time and begin to establish new, healthy habits.
- Do what you do when you never smoke and go where you go when you never smoke. When cravings hit, drink some water, take a shower or even a nap.
- Take a quick walk instead of standing around with the other smokers during your break at work.
- Keep your list of reasons why you are quitting with you so you can review it when the urges become especially overwhelming.

- Learn ways to proactively fend off urges by diverting your mind to some other enjoyable activity—instead of staying in the situation and thinking about smoking, intentionally think about or do something else.
- Put the money you would have spent on cigarettes into a fund you can use to treat yourself to something nice—a tangible reward for the hard work you are doing to quit.

Step Four: Stay Smoke-Free Forever

It is inevitable that your urge to smoke will remain even after you have weathered the difficult physical withdrawal symptoms. You may need to fight the urge for months or even years. It takes time for your mind to unlink your everyday activities with smoking and build healthy habits instead. Remember, if you do slip up once, it doesn't mean you have to relapse into a full-blown habit again. You can stay smoke free forever!

OPTIONS TO HELP YOU QUIT

Nicotine replacement therapy comes in the forms of patches, sprays, gums, inhalers, or lozenges. It may relieve some of the physical symptoms of withdrawal, giving you the opportunity to focus on overcoming the psychological symptoms.

Prescription drugs, some of which can be used alongside nicotine replacement therapy, can also help. Some antidepressants can help with nicotine cravings. Another drug, varenicline tartrate (Chantix), can reduce cravings by targeting the part of the brain affected by nicotine. Talk to your doctor about the different possibilities.

Non-traditional options include therapy or counseling, acupuncture, and support groups. Online or phone-based support is available, as well as traditional support groups. An employer, health insurance company, or local hospital can help you find an appropriate group.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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This information in this publication is not intended as a substitute for professional help or to be used as a diagnostic tool. If you have serious difficulties with anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues, please seek professional help.