

# Smoking: Risks and How to Quit

For parents and teens, smoking leads to serious health problems. Cigarettes and other forms of tobacco use increase your child's risk of many types of cancer, heart and lung diseases, and other serious diseases. Smoking also reduces your ability to play sports and do physical activity and damages your appearance. The people around you can also suffer health effects from your smoking. Cigarettes are addictive, making it very difficult to quit. If you or your child smokes, your doctor can help you quit or direct you to someone who can.

## What are the health effects of smoking?

- *Smoking kills people.* It is the most common preventable cause of illness and death. One in five deaths is caused by a smoking-related illness; on average, smokers die 10 years earlier than nonsmokers. Smoking increases the risk of many serious diseases, including:
  - Lung cancer and other cancers.
  - Heart disease, including heart attacks.
  - Other lung diseases, ranging from bronchitis (inflammation of the airways) to emphysema (permanent loss of lung function).
  - Blood vessel diseases (vascular diseases), leading to problems such as stroke and high blood pressure. In men, smoking increases the risk of problems with sexual function (erectile dysfunction).
- *Smoking damages your health now.* Most of the health effects of smoking occur later in life. However, smoking also has harmful health effects in teens and young adults, including:
  - Reduced physical fitness. Even in trained athletes, smoking reduces physical performance and endurance.
  - Problems with lung function, including bronchitis and “smoker’s cough,” increased phlegm production, wheezing.
  - Smoking has several effects that damage your appearance and attractiveness, including dry skin and wrinkles, voice changes, stained teeth, and other dental problems.

- Although less common, serious health effects can occur even in young people. For example, women who smoke and take birth control pills may be at increased risk of heart attack.
- *Smoking hurts the health of people around you.* Second-hand (passive) smoke causes serious health effects, even in people who don’t smoke. This is especially true for children. For women, smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of health problems in the developing fetus. Children exposed to their parents’ smoking are at increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), have a higher rate of respiratory infections, and may be at increased risk of cancer.
- *Smokeless tobacco is harmful too.* Chewing tobacco and snuff also increase the risk of health problems, especially mouth and throat cancer and gum (periodontal) disease.

## What are the facts on smoking and teens?

- Most smokers start in their teen years. Most teens who smoke continue to smoke as adults.
- *Smoking is addictive.* Once their bodies get used to the nicotine in tobacco, smokers have physical cravings for cigarettes and tobacco. Once they’re addicted, smokers tend to increase the amount they smoke.
- The good news is that teen smoking rates have dropped significantly in recent years. However, nearly one fourth of high school students still smoke. So do 8% of middle school students.
- The longer you smoke, the greater the health risks. There is no “safe” number of cigarettes or length of time to smoke. “Low-tar” or “light” cigarettes are no safer than regular cigarettes. No matter how long you smoke, the health risks decrease once you quit.

## How can I quit smoking?

Quitting smoking is tough because nicotine is addictive. All smokers should be urged to quit and be offered help in making a plan for quitting. Most states have a “Quitline” that can put you in touch with people who can help you quit. The American Cancer Society can help you find a Quitline in our area; call 1-800-ACS-2345 (1-800-227-2345).

Several approaches can improve your chances of quitting smoking successfully, including medications and behavioral

change programs. The results are best when these two approaches are used together.

- *Nicotine replacement therapy.* Different types of medications can provide your body with the nicotine it craves while you're trying to quit.
  - One common form is a nicotine-containing patch that you put on your skin. The patch supplies a steady level of nicotine throughout the day to help you resist cravings. The dose of nicotine in the patch is gradually lowered.
  - Other forms of nicotine replacement therapy are available, such as chewing gum. Some of these products can be bought at a drug store, while others require a doctor's prescription.
  - Talk to your doctor before using any type of nicotine replacement therapy. Pregnant women and certain other people shouldn't use these products. Don't smoke or use any other type of tobacco (including "smokeless" tobacco) while using nicotine replacement.
- *Other medications.* Certain other medications can aid in quitting. For example, the antidepressant drug Zyban (generic name: bupropion) can be helpful. Side effects are possible. These drugs should only be used under a doctor's supervision.
- *Behavioral change programs.* Many types of behavioral change programs are available for people trying to quit smoking. These may include brief follow-up appointments or phone calls, Quitlines, and counseling to help you in quitting or coping with withdrawal. Ask your doctor about resources in our community.
- *Physical withdrawal* is a problem for people trying to quit smoking, even with nicotine replacement therapy.

For some period of time, you may have withdrawal symptoms such as dizziness, headache, and bad mood. These are usually worst in the first two or three days after quitting and gradually get better after that.

- *Psychological withdrawal* is also a problem. For most smokers, quitting smoking is a major habit change. Especially for the first few days, try to avoid situations in which you would previously have smoked, such as being around other smokers. Try to think of alternative activities to do instead of smoking (exercise is a great one). Most important, quitting smoking takes willpower!
- *Most attempts at quitting fail.* That's how addictive smoking is. Don't get too discouraged if this happens; try to learn from the experience. Most people try several times before they finally succeed in quitting smoking.

### When should I call your office?

Call our office if:

- You have questions about how to quit smoking.
- You are thinking of taking nicotine replacement therapy or any other medication to help quit smoking.

### Where can I get more information?

- Smokefree.gov ([www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)) provides accurate, up-to-date information and professional assistance to help support the immediate and long-term needs of people trying to quit smoking.
- The American Cancer Society offers a "Guide to Quitting Smoking" and many other helpful resources. On the Internet at [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org), or call 1-800-ACS-2345.