

# Quitting smoking

## Why quit?

Tobacco smoking is the single largest cause of preventable death and disease in Australia, with over 19,000 tobacco caused deaths per year.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 6,000 Australian women<sup>2</sup> die prematurely each year from tobacco caused illness.<sup>2</sup>

Tobacco smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals<sup>3</sup>, including:

- tar
- nicotine
- carbon monoxide – poisonous gas found in car fumes
- ammonia – found in floor cleaners
- arsenic – found in rat poison.

## Reasons to quit

Quitting smoking at any age results in immediate benefits, including increased life expectancy, provided that the person quits before the development of cancer or other illnesses. Women smokers are faced with a number of additional health problems.

### Benefits of quitting

- Nicotine is out of the system in two hours.
- Heart rate slows down and blood pressure slightly drops after six hours.
- Carbon monoxide is out of the system after 12 hours and lung function begins to improve.
- Taste and sense of smell improve after two days.
- Exercising becomes easier and more air gets into the lungs.
- Blood flow to the hands and feet improves after two months.
- After three months the lungs work more efficiently and are able to remove mucus. Blood flow to the limbs also improves.

## Quit tips

**If you've decided to stop smoking:**

- **Call the Quitline and speak to a trained counsellor (131 848 local call cost)**
- **Talk to your doctor or pharmacist and plan a quitting strategy. This may include using Nicotine Replacement Therapy.**
- **If your partner or friend smokes, encourage them to consider quitting too.**

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- After 12 months the risk of heart disease is half that of a continuing smoker.
- Stopping smoking reduces the incidence and progression of lung disease including chronic bronchitis and emphysema.
- After quitting smoking for ten years the risk of lung cancer is less than half that of a continuing smoker.
- After 15 years the risk of heart attack and stroke is almost the same as a person who has never smoked.

## Quitting

Many smokers need to practice quitting several times before they give up for good. The best advice is to keep trying. Practice helps smokers plan what to do the next time they get an urge to smoke.<sup>4</sup> The success rate of those who use some form of assistance is double that of those who try to quit on their own.<sup>5</sup>

## Approaches to quitting

### Cold turkey

For many people, going cold turkey is the most successful way of quitting. This means stopping completely without cutting down. Self-help materials are available and help smokers recognise the triggers for smoking. Smokers can call the Quitline on 131 848 to receive free resources and free counselling advice.

### Gradually reducing

This involves delaying the first cigarette of the day by one to two hours. A quit date should be set two weeks after starting to reduce smoking.<sup>13</sup>

## Nicotine replacement therapy

Using nicotine gum, patches, lozenges or inhalers may be useful for heavy smokers.<sup>6</sup> A doctor or pharmacist will be able to explain how to use gum, patches, lozenges or an inhaler.

## Other pharmacological aids

Prescription drug Zyban has an active ingredient bupropion hydrochloride, which is also in certain antidepressant medications. Zyban can assist smokers to quit but has to be prescribed by a doctor.<sup>7, 8, 9</sup>

## Counselling services

Some people may wish to seek out additional support in the form of individual or group counselling to help them to quit.

## Alternative methods

While there is often interest in acupuncture, hypnotherapy, herbal and homeopathic preparations there is insufficient evidence on the effectiveness of these as methods for quitting.<sup>10</sup>

## Nicotine withdrawal

Nicotine withdrawal is usually worst in the first 24-48 hours of quitting. Few people experience all the symptoms and they don't all happen at once. The symptoms you might experience are a normal and expected part of quitting smoking. The symptoms will gradually decline in intensity and the worst is usually over after a couple of weeks.

Withdrawal is your body's response to ridding itself of dependence on nicotine. Some people think of the withdrawal as 'recovery symptoms'. After about two weeks 'recovery symptoms' should be gone. If you have a moderate or high level of nicotine dependence and expect withdrawals, using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) is a smart move.

## Quitting and weight

Many women put off quitting for fear of gaining weight. Although weight gain can be of concern, it is important to remember that remaining a smoker is more of a health risk. Not everyone gains weight after quitting. A sensible eating and exercise plan will assist in avoiding additional weight gain.<sup>11</sup>

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