

Stop smoking benefits



Nicotine works in much the same way as other addictive drugs – it causes the brain to release large amounts of dopamine, a chemical associated with pleasure.

When nicotine levels begin to drop, as they do between cigarettes, the body craves more. That means you want to light up again. If you don't, a variety of symptoms, including anxiety, irritability, insomnia, fatigue and even depression, may occur. For some people, these feelings can be so overwhelming that it seems impossible to quit smoking.

The bad news

The fact is, if you continue smoking the nicotine will increase your heart rate by 10 – 20 beats a minute, raise your blood pressure and decreases the amount of oxygen in your blood, causing tar and chemical irritants known to cause cancer to collect in your lungs, leading to smoker's cough.

Smoking will also cause a build up of fatty deposit in the arteries which eventually leads to heart disease. It depresses the immune system and makes you more susceptible to infection.

Since smoking affects the blood vessels in the skin, it gives you a dull complexion and causes your skin to wrinkle and lose its plump natural texture. And over a prolonged period you will acquire deeply etched lines between the nose to the lips. That's the bad news.

Benefits of stopping

The good news is that the benefits of giving up kick in

immediately. Within 20 minutes of stopping smoking, blood pressure and pulse return to normal. After eight hours, nicotine and carbon monoxide levels in the blood are halved and oxygen levels in the blood return to normal. After 24 hours, carbon monoxide is eliminated from the body and lungs start to clear out the accumulated tar. After 48 hours there is no nicotine left in the body and taste and smell are greatly improved. After 72 hours, breathing becomes easier, bronchial tubes begin to relax and energy levels increases. After two to 12 weeks, circulation improves, making walking and running a lot easier. And after three to 9 months, coughs, wheezing and breathing problems improve as lung function increased.

Goodbye smoking

If you want to stop smoking, you may be considering going cold turkey or you may opt for one of the nicotine-replacement products: patches, gum, or oral spray. Although these products can increase your chances of quitting, there are issues to consider before deciding which one to use.

These replacement products works by supplying your body with just enough nicotine to keep the craving under control, thereby helping you fight the urge to smoke. Of the three types available, the gum and the spray offer a blast of nicotine similar to what you

experience when you light up a cigarette.

However, the replacement products have side effects worth noting, including headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, itchy skin, muscle weakness, upset stomach and diarrhoea. Sprays may also cause nasal irritation and coughing.

Nicotine-replacement products may satisfy the physical need for nicotine, but they will not affect the psychological cravings associated with smoking. A replacement regimen works best when it lasts a few months and is combined with a behavioural programme that addresses smoking's habitual aspects.

Amfebutamone (bupropion) is an antidepressant that also helps smokers to quit.

The replacement regime should be continued for 10 – 12 weeks with a gradual withdrawal over this period. If you do not stop smoking within three months, you should review the regimen with a doctor.

Proceed with care

Although the gum, spray and patch contain less nicotine than cigarettes, there is a small risk of addiction. However, experts contend that the addiction is less harmful than smoking. Still, there is a concern for people with heart disease. One test indicated that if used for extended time, some of the replacement products might have the same negative impact on the heart as cigarettes.

Therefore to help you decide what to try or how to go about quitting, talk to your doctor about your smoking habits and overall health. Most important, never smoke while using these products. The double dose of nicotine could dangerously overload your system.

Furthermore, remember to join our “be a quitter” email series.



Facts

- Quitting is a challenge, but millions of people successfully quit. 21 per cent of women and 27 per cent of men are ex-smokers.
- Research shows that around three in every four current smokers would like to give up altogether.
- Smoking causes 30 per cent of all cancer deaths (including at least 84 per cent of lung cancer deaths), 17 per cent of all heart disease deaths and at least 80 per cent of deaths from bronchitis and emphysema. Stopping smoking reduces this excess risk; stopping before age 35 can reduce a smoker's health risks to the same as those of a lifelong non-smoker.