

Smoking: Break the addiction



Smoking tobacco products can cause lung cancer, eye disease, and have other serious effects on your health. If you're not ready to quit cold turkey, there are ways to reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke to lower your risk of disease.

Tobacco is addictive

One reason it's so hard to quit smoking is the addictive properties of tobacco. Nicotine is highly addictive as it stimulates the pleasure centres of the brain, and you experience serious withdrawals when you get less than you're used to. Anxiety, mood disorders, and feelings of ill health can be the reason you return to old habits and end up never stopping completely.

Gradually reducing your nicotine intake may be one of the best ways to finally quit smoking. It allows your body to adjust to the reduced levels of nicotine without some of the unpleasant side effects of quitting cold turkey.

One of the strategies to help you is commonly referred to as nicotine fading.

The steps involved in nicotine fading

Step 1: Sit down and make a plan.

It's important to have a structured plan for fading. Sit down and decide on a date you want to start. Make sure it's not too far ahead in the future or you may lose motivation. Usually, fading is done for 2-3 weeks, so plan that on your schedule.

Within this period, decide on the number of cigarettes you'll smoke a day until the last day is zero.

Step 2: Identify the most difficult times.

Make a list of all the times you usually smoke and identify those that will be hardest to change. If you smoke more when you're out with friends, adjust your daily intake to allow for a less drastic change to these times in the first few days. During other times, plan what you'll use as a backup to smoking. For example, smoking in your car can be replaced with a cup of coffee or chewing gum.

Step 3: Make your intentions known.

Most people will encourage and support you and make you accountable for your actions. Close friends and family can help to distract you through the harder times and knowing that you have support can help you deal with mood changes.

Step 4: Give yourself a break.

You deserve some credit for making the decision to quit and initiating the steps. Acknowledge that some days will be more difficult than others, but that you have a choice in every decision you make. Reward yourself for good days, and record the reasons you had a good day to use as coping strategies on days that are harder.

It takes just three months to change your brain chemistry after you quit smoking. Think about the rewards you'll reap for years to come once you do.