

The benefits of being tobacco free

Nicotine works in much the same way as other addictive drugs – it causes the brain to release large amounts of dopamine which is 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.

Facts about smoking

If you continue smoking, the nicotine will increase your heart rate by 10-20 beats a minute, raise your blood pressure, and decrease the amount of oxygen in your blood. This causes 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 deposits 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 and the lips.

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 **8 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 increase.
- After **2 to 12 weeks**, circulation improves, making walking and running a lot easier.
- After **3 to 9 months**, coughs, wheezing, and breathing problems improve as lung function increases.

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.

Replacement products work by supplying your body with just enough nicotine to keep the craving under control, 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.

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. The replacement regime should be continued for 10-12 weeks with a gradual withdrawal over this period. If you do not stop smoking within 3 months, you should review the regimen with a doctor.

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.

To help you go about quitting, talk to your doctor about your smoking habits and overall health. Most importantly, never smoke while using these products. The double dose of nicotine could dangerously overload your system.

Things to remember

- **Quitting is a challenge** but many people quit successfully. 21% of women and 27% of men are ex-smokers.
- **Research shows** that around 3 in every 4 current smokers would like to give up altogether.
- **Smoking causes** 30% of all cancer deaths including at least 84% of lung cancer deaths, 17% of all heart disease deaths, and at least 80% of deaths from bronchitis and emphysema.
- **Stopping smoking** reduces this excess risk; stopping before the age of 35 can reduce a smoker's health risks to the same as those of a lifelong non-smoker.

So, don't hesitate. Quit today!