

For your health

Smoking Cessation

You can stop smoking

If you smoke, it's never too late to get the benefits of stopping. The day after you quit, your heart already starts to recover. Your risk of heart disease will drop dramatically within the first two years after kicking the habit. According to the American Lung Association, a two-pack-a-day smoker is at double the risk of heart disease compared with nonsmokers. However, for people who quit smoking, the amount of heart risk that is added by smoking can be lowered by one-half within a year.

So how do you do it? It is not recommended for you to reduce your habit only by smoking fewer cigarettes, because studies have suggested that smokers who are permitted less frequent cigarettes end up smoking each cigarette more deeply (and to a shorter butt), so total nicotine intake does not decrease. Switching to low-tar, low-nicotine cigarettes has also not been shown to be a helpful strategy: By inhaling more deeply, smokers can get as much nicotine (and tar) out of a low-nicotine cigarette as from a regular one.

The only safe choice is to quit completely. And here's how:

Try the write stuff

Write down your most important personal reason to quit. Is it to regain control of your life and health? To set a good example for your children? Personal motivation is a key predictor of success in quitting smoking, and keeping a personal record of that motivation helps many smokers quit.

Avoid the triggers

To be successful at quitting, you have to avoid or even leave situations that trigger the urge to light up. That includes social gatherings where smoking is permitted, restaurants, and maybe even your morning coffee.

Don't worry about your waistline

Weight gain is a realistic concern, but you should keep this concern in perspective. About one in three smokers gain weight when they quit, but 90 percent of them actually lose that weight within a year or two. Meanwhile, two in three either lose weight (usually by starting an exercise program) or stay at the same weight.

Get with a program

Following a regimen from a smoking cessation program offers you a better chance at success. You can get information from these national agencies:

- Agency for Health Care Research and Quality at www.ahrq.gov
- American Cancer Society at www.cancer.org

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- American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org
- American Lung Association at www.lungusa.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Office on Smoking and Health at www.cdc.gov/tobacco
- National Cancer Institute (NCI) at www.nci.nih.gov



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