

What You Should Know About Quitting Smoking

About 22% of US women smoke. Every year 174,000 women die from smoking-related diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, and lung disease. The chemicals in cigarette smoke are harmful to both smokers and the nonsmokers around them. A pregnant smoker risks her baby's health even before birth.

I'm convinced that smoking is bad for me, so why can't I just quit?

The nicotine in cigarettes causes an addiction that makes quitting a struggle for many. You may have tried before and given up. When a person stops smoking, there are symptoms of nicotine withdrawal, which may include restlessness, irritability, sleeplessness, sadness, anxiety, and/or weight gain.

The good news is that there is help available for your success in quitting. Effective counseling can give you practical advice for lifestyle change, as well as support to continue with your quitting efforts. Medications are available to help taper down the nicotine dependence and deal with the stress of withdrawal.

What can I do on my own to quit?

Make a list of every benefit you will receive from quitting (such as better health, improved sense of taste and smell, protecting your family, whiter teeth, saving money—list as many rewards as you can think of), and keep this posted where you can see it, add to it, and stay motivated by it. Don't be discouraged by the short-term withdrawal symptoms in the first few weeks.

Change lifestyle behaviors that are closely tied with your smoking habits; for example, take a short walk on your work break instead of having a cigarette. Get connected with others who will support your efforts to quit. State and national telephone quitlines are available to give you advice and supportive resources.

What kind of medications can help me quit smoking?

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) provides small, measured doses of nicotine, which help relieve the cravings felt when abruptly stopping. NRT is less harmful than nicotine from cigarettes, and the dosages will be tapered down as treatment progresses. NRT is available in several forms: gum, skin patch, lozenge, nasal spray,



and inhaler. Some are sold over the counter, while others require a prescription. You must not use tobacco products when you are using NRT.

Two prescription medications without nicotine that may help withdrawal symptoms are the antidepressant bupropion (Zyban) and varenicline (Chantix), a drug approved specifically for nicotine addiction.

Your clinician can advise which option is best for you. All medications have potential side effects, so you should consider these when choosing, especially during pregnancy. A combination of NRT, nonnicotine medications, and/or counseling may be necessary for successful quitting.

What if I start smoking again?

Many people make several attempts to stop smoking. If you have a relapse, try again. Speak to a health care professional to get effective treatment. If you go 3 months without smoking, there is an excellent chance of remaining tobacco free for life.