

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SMOKING CESSATION

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## What Are the Risks of Smoking?

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Someone who smokes can expect to live 10 years less than someone who has never smoked. Smoking affects almost every organ and increases risk for many diseases, like:

- Cancer
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Diabetes
- Aortic aneurysms
- Peripheral vascular disease
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Asthma exacerbations
- Pregnancy problems, like miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, and facial clefts
- Erectile dysfunction
- Vision problems, such as cataracts or macular degeneration
- Gastroesophageal reflux
- Osteoporosis and hip fractures
- Rheumatoid arthritis

## What Are the Benefits of Quitting?

The benefits of quitting begin within minutes and can last years. Quitting will significantly reduce your risk for lung cancer and death from heart disease. Your circulation will improve within weeks, and your lung function will improve within months. The longer you abstain, the more you reduce your risk for other diseases—even to as low as that of someone who never smoked. You are never too old, young, healthy, or sick to benefit from quitting.

## Why Is Quitting So Hard?

Most smokers want to quit, but it is not easy. Nicotine, the main chemical in cigarette smoke, is highly addictive. Smoking may also be a comforting habit that is linked with daily activities, which makes it hard to stop. Quitting may lead to withdrawal symptoms, including depressed mood, anxiety, irritability, trouble concentrating, increased hunger, restlessness, and trouble sleeping. To quit smoking, you need to change your behavior and address your nicotine addiction. The key to success is to keep trying; most people must try several times before they quit for good.

## How Can I Quit Smoking?

You are more likely to be successful if you have the right support. A mixture of counseling, medicine, and follow-up support gives you the best chance for success.



Your doctor can refer you to resources to help you quit. These could include telephone quit-lines, special treatment programs, web-based resources, and individual or group counseling. Cognitive behavioral therapy can help you learn more about your habit and how to change your behavior.

Nicotine replacement therapy, including gum, patches, or lozenges, and nicotine inhalers or nasal sprays release lower doses of nicotine in your body than you would get from smoking. They help to reduce your cravings and can lessen symptoms of withdrawal. Combining forms may be more effective than one alone. Ask your doctor how to use nicotine gum, inhalers, and nasal sprays so they work best.

Prescription medicines (bupropion and varenicline) help to reduce nicotine cravings. Varenicline is the most effective treatment available; it should be used before and after your quit date to support your efforts to quit.

Talk with your doctor about which combination of support is best for you.

## What Are E-Cigarettes?

E-cigarettes have been around for about 15 years. They contain a liquid-filled chamber, a battery, and a heating element to vaporize liquid. They are marketed as a safer alternative to tobacco, but their long-term health effects are unknown. E-cigarettes differ from nicotine inhalers, which contain a specific dose of nicotine, do not have a heating element or added toxins, and have been shown to help in quitting. E-cigarettes contain toxic substances, and their nicotine content can vary, with some having as much as regular cigarettes. They have been shown to increase blood pressure and asthma and can explode and cause burns. There is not enough evidence that their benefits outweigh their risks to recommend them for help in quitting.

## Questions for My Doctor

- What support options are available to help me quit?
- Should I take medicine to help me quit smoking? Which ones?
- Are there risks or side effects to the medicine?
- How long will it take for my cravings to go away?
- I have tried to quit and failed. Is there anything that can help me quit for good?

## For More Information



American College of Physicians  
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American Lung Association  
[www.lung.org/quit-smoking](http://www.lung.org/quit-smoking)

National Institutes of Health  
<https://smokefree.gov>