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*The National Women's Health Information Center*

A project of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health



## Frequently Asked Questions about Smoking

### **Is smoking a major cause of lung cancer in women?**

Many people think that lung cancer affects mostly men. But even though we hear more about breast cancer, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in women. And nearly all lung cancer deaths in women are due to smoking. Quitting smoking now is one important change you can make to improve your lung and overall health and live longer. Former smokers have a lower risk for lung cancer than do current smokers. In one to nine months after quitting smoking, your lungs will function better. And after 10 years, your risk of lung cancer is nearly the same as someone who never smoked.

### **Should women who smoke be concerned about heart disease?**

Yes. More women die each year from heart disease than from any other illness. Smoking is the major cause of heart disease in women, especially those younger than age 50. Women who use birth control pills have a much higher risk of heart disease if they smoke. But after just one year of quitting smoking, you reduce your risk of heart disease by half.

### **Why do women and girls smoke?**

Women and girls smoke for different reasons. Some women smoke to deal with stress or control weight. Younger women and girls may start smoking as a way of rebelling, being independent, or fitting in with their peers. Tobacco companies use research on how women and girls feel about themselves to influence women and girls to smoke. But there is never a good reason to smoke, and it's best to never start. There are, though, many good reasons to quit smoking. When you quit, your health and quality of life will improve. You also will help safeguard the health of those you live with by not exposing them to second-hand smoke (the smoke released from a lit cigarette or cigar).

### **Why should I quit smoking?**

When you quit:

- Your chances of getting sick from smoking will be less.
- You will have more energy and breathe easier.
- If you are pregnant, your baby will get more oxygen and be healthier.
- Your children and other people in your home will be healthier. Second-hand smoke can cause asthma and other health problems.
- You will have more money to spend on other things.

## **What happens to my body when I smoke?**

When you smoke, you can become addicted to, or not able to do without, nicotine. Nicotine is as habit-forming as the drugs heroin and cocaine. Over time, you may have problems with your teeth and gums; staining on your teeth, fingers, and fingernails; bad breath; and wrinkling skin. There are also other, more serious health problems, caused by smoking:

- Lung cancer and other lung diseases, such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis
- Other kinds of cancer, such as cancer of the throat, mouth, esophagus (food pipe), pancreas, kidney, bladder, and cervix (opening to the uterus or womb)
- Atherosclerosis – clogged and narrowed arteries
- Heart disease
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Early menopause – the stopping of menstrual periods
- Osteoporosis – the thinning and weakening of bones
- Infertility - problems getting pregnant
- Problems during pregnancy like miscarriage, early or premature birth, having an infant born with low birth weight, stillbirth, and even infant death

## **How can I learn if I am at risk for health problems from smoking?**

Learn about your own risk for health problems, or the risk of a smoker you know. Enter your profile into NCI's Smoker's Risk Calculator at <http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/smokersrisk>.

## **What are the dangers of second-hand smoke?**

Second-hand smoke happens when non-smokers inhale other people's tobacco smoke. It includes:

- Sidestream smoke – smoke that comes directly from a burning cigarette, pipe, or cigar.
- Mainstream smoke – smoke that is exhaled by the smoker.

When a cigarette is smoked, about half of the smoke is sidestream smoke. Sidestream smoke contains most of the same chemicals found in the mainstream smoke inhaled by the smoker.

People who don't smoke, but are exposed to second-hand smoke, absorb nicotine and other chemicals just as someone who smokes does. Studies have shown that second-hand smoke can cause lung cancer in healthy adults who do not smoke. Children of parents who smoke are more likely to suffer from pneumonia, bronchitis, ear infections, asthma, and SIDS (the sudden death of a baby under age one which cannot be explained). Mothers who smoke and breastfeed may pass harmful chemicals from nicotine to their baby through breast milk.

## Is it ever too late to quit?

No, it's never too late to quit. Quit smoking now to start feeling these benefits.

20 minutes after quitting:

- Your blood pressure drops back to normal.
- The temperature in your hands and feet returns to normal.

8 hours after quitting:

- The carbon monoxide (a gas that can be toxic) in your blood drops to normal.

24 hours after quitting:

- Your chance of having a heart attack goes down.

2 days after quitting:

- You can taste and smell things better.

2 weeks to 3 months after quitting:

- You have better blood flow.
- Your lungs are working better.

1 to 9 months after quitting:

- Coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue, and shortness of breath decrease.
- Your lungs start to function better, lowering your risk of lung infections.

1 year after quitting:

- You reduce your risk for heart disease by half.

5 to 15 years after quitting:

- Your risk of having a stroke is the same as someone who never smoked.

10 years after quitting:

- Your risk of lung cancer is nearly the same as someone who never smoked.
- Your risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas also decrease.

15 years after quitting:

- Your risk of heart disease is now the same as someone who has never smoked.

If you or someone you know has smoked for a long time, it's still important to quit. Take the *Older Smokers IQ Quiz* at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/other/smoking.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/other/smoking.html) to find out more about why quitting smoking now is worth the effort.

## What have other women done to quit smoking?

Almost half of women who smoke have tried to quit during the past year. Many women have to try two or three times before they are able to quit for good. It's hard work, but don't give up! Millions of women have been able to quit, and you can too!

Follow these steps to help you to quit for good:

- **Learn how much you depend on nicotine.** Knowing how addicted you are to nicotine can help you decide what kind of help you need. Take the Nicotine Addiction Test. ([http://www.smokefree.gov/guide/nicotine\\_addiction.asp](http://www.smokefree.gov/guide/nicotine_addiction.asp))
- **Get ready to quit by picking a date to stop smoking.** Quitting all at once works better than trying to quit a little at a time.
- **Write down why you want to quit.** Keep this list as a handy reminder.
- **Tell loved ones, friends, and coworkers your quit date.** Ask them for their support. Ask them not to smoke around you or leave cigarettes out around you.
- **Create a fund.** Each time you would normally buy a pack of cigarettes, put that saved money in a special place. If you used to smoke one pack per day, after one month, you've saved about \$150. Set a goal and reward yourself once you reach that goal.
- **Plan for challenges.** Think ahead for how you will deal with situations or triggers that will make you want to smoke.
- **Get medicine and use it correctly.** There are many medicines that can help you quit and reduce your urge to smoke. You and your health care provider can decide what medicine will work best for you. Always first talk with your health care provider before trying any medicines, especially when you are pregnant or if you have heart problems.
- **Be prepared for relapse.** Most people start smoking again within the first three months after quitting. Don't give up if this happens to you. Many women try to quit several times before quitting for good. Learn from what helped you and what didn't the last time you tried to quit to increase your chances of success next time. It may help you to keep a craving journal to record when and why you smoke. You can find an example of a journal at [www.smokefree.gov/docs/craving.pdf](http://www.smokefree.gov/docs/craving.pdf)
- **Get more help if you need it.** Join a quit-smoking program or support group to help you quit. Contact your local hospital, health center, or health department for quit-smoking programs in your area. Your state may also provide toll-free quit line phone numbers. Find the number in your state at [www.smokefree.gov/usmap.html#](http://www.smokefree.gov/usmap.html#).

## Can medicines really help me quit?

There are many medicines that can help you quit smoking. So you don't have to do it alone. At first, you may feel depressed, have trouble sleeping, or just not feel like yourself. This means that your body is going through withdrawal, or getting used to not having nicotine. These symptoms only last a few weeks and medicines can help give you some relief. Most help you quit by giving you small, steady doses of nicotine. Using them can double your chances of quitting for good. Talk with your health care provider about which of these medicines is right for you.

Nicotine replacement therapy includes nicotine patches, gum, nasal spray, and inhalers. They help lessen your urge to smoke by taking the place of nicotine from cigarettes.

- Nicotine patch – worn on the skin and supplies a steady amount of nicotine to the body through the skin.
- Nicotine gum – releases nicotine into the bloodstream through the lining in your mouth.
- Nicotine nasal spray – inhaled through your nose and passes into your bloodstream.
- Nicotine inhaler – inhaled through the mouth and is absorbed in the mouth and throat, but not in the lungs.

In general, when you quit smoking, use the nicotine as a “substitute” for one to two months, then gradually cut down the nicotine until you stop that, too. You can buy patches and gum on your own at a drug store. You need a prescription for the inhaler and nasal spray.

Bupropion SR (Zyban ®) is a medicine that has no nicotine but may help you quit. It is an anti-depressant that helps relieve withdrawal symptoms and the urge to smoke. Your health care provider can prescribe this medicine.

Not everyone can use these medicines. If you are pregnant or have heart problems, be sure to talk with your health care provider before using any of them.

## **I've tried to quit many times. What if I can't quit smoking?**

Don't be discouraged if you start smoking again. Most relapses occur within the first three months after quitting. Remember, most women try two or three times before they quit for good. Certain things or situations can increase your chances of smoking again, such as drinking alcohol, being around other people who smoke, gaining weight, and stress. Talk with your health care provider for ways to help avoid or deal with these situations.

Everyone can quit smoking. Think back to why quitting was important to you. Look for a special reason to motivate you to try again.

- **Pregnant women/new moms** – quit now to protect your baby's health and your own.
- **Heart attack patients** – quit now to lower your risk of a second heart attack.
- **Lung cancer patients** – quit now to reduce your risk of a second cancer.
- **Women post-menopause** – quit now to reduce your risk of osteoporosis.
- **Mothers of children and teens** – quit now to protect them from illnesses caused by second-hand smoke.

## **Won't quitting smoking make me gain weight?**

Many women fear weight gain when they quit smoking. You may gain a little weight, but usually less than 10 pounds. You can help prevent weight gain by eating a healthful diet and staying active. Don't let weight gain distract you from your main goal—quitting smoking. Some people even gain less when they use a quit-smoking medicine.

## **Is it better to smoke “light” cigarettes?**

You may think that “light” cigarettes are less harmful than regular ones. More women than men smoke these brands, mostly due to advertising targeted to women. But they’re not better. They put smokers at the same risk for health problems just as regular ones do. Some cigarette packs say that light cigarettes have lower tar and nicotine. Don’t let these claims fool you. Cigarette makers use smoking machines to figure out the amount of tar and nicotine in the cigarettes. These machines “smoke” every brand of cigarettes the same way. But people don’t smoke cigarettes the same way machines do. People may inhale more deeply, take longer or more frequent puffs, or smoke extra cigarettes to satisfy their nicotine craving. Smokers then inhale more tar, nicotine, and other chemicals than the smoking machine measures.

Cigarette makers also put tiny holes in the filters of light cigarettes to dilute the smoke with air. But many smokers block the holes with their fingers or lips, and it’s the same as smoking regular cigarettes.

Cigarette makers can also make the paper wrapped around the tobacco of light cigarettes burn faster. This is so the smoking machines get in fewer puffs before the cigarettes burn down. The result is that the machine measures less tar and nicotine in the smoke of the cigarette. The bottom line is there is no such thing as a safe cigarette. Quitting for good is the only proven way to reduce your risk of smoking-related problems.

## **Are menthol brands safer than other ones?**

No, they are not safer and can be more dangerous. People who smoke menthol brands can inhale more deeply and take longer puffs than smokers of non-menthol brands.

## **I only smoke cigars. Are they bad for my health?**

Yes, cigar smoking increases your risk of dying from many cancers. These include cancer of the lungs, oral cavity (lip, tongue, mouth, and throat), larynx (voice box), and esophagus. Daily cigar smokers are at higher risk for getting heart and lung disease.

Even though cigar smoking is not as common for women, it is on the rise. Most new cigar users are teenagers who smoke on occasion. Two studies showed that cigar use has increased nearly five times in women and is also increasing among adolescent girls.

## **What is the difference between cigar and cigarette smoking?**

One of the major differences between cigar and cigarette smoking is the amount of tobacco inhaled. Most cigarette smokers smoke every day and inhale. Many cigar smokers smoke only once in a while, and most do not inhale. This may be because cigar smoke is more irritating. But both inhaled and non-inhaled nicotine can be addictive. Cigars have more than four times the amount of nicotine as cigarettes. All cigar and cigarette smokers expose the lips, mouth, tongue, throat, and larynx to smoke whether or not they inhale. Just like cigarettes, cigar smoking can harm people around you. Because cigars have more tobacco than cigarettes due to their larger size and are smoked longer, non-smokers are exposed to higher amounts of second-hand smoke.

## How can I talk to my children about the dangers of smoking?

It's important to talk with your children about the dangers of smoking. Most adult smokers begin while in their teens or earlier. Smoking is also addictive for children and can cause harm even while they are still young. But we also know how hard it can be to compete with advertising that seems to be everywhere, making smoking look cool and appear to be a normal thing to do. Children and teens try using tobacco for many reasons, like trying to fit in with friends or control weight. The bottom line is that your children need your help to never start or to quit smoking. Here are some tips:

- Teach your children about how smoking can affect their health. Give examples of smokers they know with health problems so it seems like a real threat.
- Keep an open mind and listen to your children. Make them feel like they can talk to you about important issues like smoking. Chances are, they will be more likely to tell you if they have started smoking, or if they have been pressured by others to smoke.
- Use role-playing to help them practice ways to tell their friends they don't want to smoke.
- Praise your children so they believe in themselves and feel good about who they are.
- Be a good role model. Don't smoke, and quit now if you do.

## For more information...

For more information about quitting smoking, visit <http://www.4woman.gov/QuitSmoking>, call the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) at 1-800-994-WOMAN (9662) or contact the following resources:

### **Office on Smoking and Health, NCCDPHP, CDC, HHS**

Phone Number(s): (770) 488-5705

(800) CDC-1311 (Automated Information Request System)

Internet Address: <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/>

### **National Tobacco Quitline, TCRB, NCI, NIH, HHS**

Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences

Phone Number(s): (877) 448-7848, (877) 44U-QUIT

TTY: 1-800-332-8615

Internet Address: <http://www.smokefree.gov/talk.html>

### **Cancer Information Service, NCI, NIH, HHS**

Phone Number(s): (800) 422-6237

TTY: (800) 332-8615

Internet Address: <http://cis.nci.nih.gov/>

### **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Information Center, NHLBI, NIH, HHS**

Phone Number(s): (301) 592-8573

(800) 575-9355 (Blood Pressure & Cholesterol Information)

TTY: (240) 629-3255

Internet Address: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/infoctr/index.htm>

**American Cancer Society**

Phone Number(s): (404) 329-7520, (800) 227-2345 (24 hours)

Phone services available in English, Spanish, French, German, & Italian

Internet Address: <http://www.cancer.org/>

**American Lung Association**

Phone Number(s): (212) 315-8700, (800) 586-4872 (Calls are automatically routed to the nearest chapter)

Internet Address: <http://www.lungusa.org/>

**American Legacy Foundation**

Phone Number(s): 202-454-5555

Internet Address: <http://www.americanlegacy.org/>

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