

Health tip: Living tobacco free

Did you know tobacco use is the single largest cause of preventable death and disease in the United States? Cigarette smoking may cause many health problems including cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung diseases, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Specifically, more than 16 million Americans are living with a disease caused by smoking, in which it is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths per year in the United States alone.¹ No tobacco product is safe. This includes cigarettes, cigars, pipes, hookah, e-cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco products such as chewing tobacco. The nicotine in tobacco products is highly addictive and makes it difficult to quit, but there are many short and long term benefits to quitting.²

When used over a long period, tobacco-related chemicals such as tar and nicotine may increase your risk of many health problems. In addition to nicotine, smokers may inhale anywhere from 4,800 to 7,000 other chemicals, depending on the type of product being used. There is a long list of serious health risks associated with smoking, and knowing these may help motivate you to quit.²

Using tobacco products may put you at a greater risk of³:



Developing certain cancers, including throat, mouth, esophagus, stomach, pancreas, kidney, and lung cancers



Having gum disease and tooth loss



Developing lung problems such as chronic obstructive lung disease, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and asthma



Damaging cells that line the blood vessels



Developing a stroke or coronary artery disease which can lead to angina and heart attacks

- Increasing triglycerides (a type of fat in your blood)
- Lowering “good” cholesterol (known as HDL)



Developing type 2 diabetes



The benefits of quitting tobacco begin almost immediately⁴

20 minutes – Heart rate and blood pressure drop

24 hours – Nicotine level in the blood drops to zero

Several days – The carbon monoxide level in the blood drops to normal

1 to 12 months – Coughing, sinus congestion and shortness of breath decrease

1 year – The risk for heart attack drops dramatically

5 to 10 years – The risk of mouth, throat and esophageal cancer is half that of a smoker’s

15 years – The risk of developing coronary heart disease is that of a non-smoker’s

Get ready to quit:

- **Talk to your primary care provider about medication or other resources to help you quit such as:**
 - Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRTs)
 - Prescription Medications
 - Smoking Cessation Programs
- **Pick a quit date and a method**—successful quitting is a matter of planning and commitment.
- **Choose your method for quitting—there are three ways to quit smoking:**
 - “Cold turkey” – Stop smoking, using smokeless tobacco or vaping at once on your Quit Day.
 - Cut down the number of cigarettes you smoke, chew or times you vape each day until you stop completely.
 - Smoke only part of each cigarette, reducing the amount until you stop smoking completely.
- **Find support**—tell family members and friends of your plan to quit smoking or access one of the many organizations that can help you quit smoking. (Visit [smokefree.gov](https://www.smokefree.gov) for support and resources.)
- **Recognize your progress**—no matter how many days it’s been since you quit, each day is a victory. Make sure to reward yourself.
- **Find alternative to smoking**— Try toothpicks, cinnamon sticks, sugarless gum, sugar-free lollipops or celery as an alternative. Go to a movie, work out or go to the gym, visit non-smoking friends, take a walk, enjoy a cup of tea or coffee, or try a new hobby that involves using your hands.

Remember if you slip up, don’t give up. Use past attempts as a learning experience and review what worked well and what didn’t. Recommit yourself, re-evaluate your quit plan/method and reconnect with your support systems.



¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fast_facts/index.htm#beginning, accessed October 2021.

² Tobacco Free Life, <https://tobaccofreelife.org/tobacco/tobacco-products/>, accessed October 2021.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/health_effects/index.htm, accessed October 2021.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/benefits/index.htm, accessed October 2021.

This information is for general informational purposes only and is not intended nor should be construed as medical advice. Individuals should consult an appropriate medical professional to determine what may be right for them.