

A Smoker's Guide to Kicking the Habit

If you're going to make the effort to stop smoking, you certainly want to succeed. While three out of four smokers say they want to quit, fewer than 5 percent of smokers who quit for at least a day are able to stay away from tobacco for three months to a year, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

"Obviously, quitting smoking is not easy," says Craig Barr Taylor, M.D., director of the Laboratory for the Study of Behavioral Medicine at Stanford University in California. "We do know that light smokers who have fewer than 21 cigarettes a day are about twice as likely to succeed as heavy smokers. But people with many previous failures at quitting often succeed on their next try."

Preparing to quit

The most important step in stopping smoking is deciding that you want to quit. No matter who else is influencing you, the final decision has to be yours. Here are some things to do once you've decided to take the plunge:

- Write down, and frequently read, your reasons for giving up smoking.
- If your previous attempts to quit have failed, review the problems you had and think about ways to overcome them.
- Be realistic. Prepare yourself to cope with temporary withdrawal symptoms.
- Get other people involved. Find a friend or family member who also wants to quit. Tell people you're quitting, so they can offer support.

Treatment options

Here is a variety of ways you can try to stop smoking if you can't do it cold turkey. Different smoking-cessation methods and treatments include:

- *Stopping gradually.* Switch to a brand you find unpleasant. Smoke only half of each cigarette. Each day, reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke. Smoke only when you want a cigarette badly, and make smoking inconvenient.
- *Self-help methods.* Kits, books, pamphlets, video and audio programs.
- *Programs, clinics and groups.* Smoking-cessation programs are offered by the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, clinics, hospitals and private treatment centers.
- *Hypnosis.* In motivated people, this method of smoking cessation has had some success. Options include private sessions and programs that teach self-hypnosis.
- *Nicotine gum, patches, nasal spray and inhaler.* By acting as a replacement source of nicotine, these products can ease withdrawal symptoms. Oral prescription medications to help stop smoking are also available.

Self-help tips

No matter what methods you choose to quit smoking, you can apply these helpful tips to boost your morale:

- Develop a nonsmoking environment at home and work. Get rid of ashtrays, matches, lighters and, of course, cigarettes.
- Spend free time in places where smoking isn't allowed, such as museums, theaters and stores.
- Drink a lot of liquids.
- Avoid beverages you associate with smoking.
- Keep your hands busy so you won't miss holding a cigarette.
- Keep oral substitutes, such as healthful snack foods, handy.
- Associate with nonsmokers whenever possible.
- Learn relaxation techniques to combat anxiety.
- Start exercising to help reduce the possibility of weight gain.
- Eat healthful meals and get plenty of rest.
- Concentrate on the immediate and long-term benefits and rewards of living smoke-free.