

Quit One Step at a Time

Saying good-bye to cigarettes for good can be difficult. To succeed, you need to make changes to your daily life. But, like the many others who have quit, you too can triumph. Brighter days are ahead.

People smoke for different reasons, and they quit in different ways. Some people quit cold turkey. Others cut down slowly before they stop altogether. Some people stop smoking with the help of the nicotine patch or nicotine gum. Your doctor can help you decide what will work best for you, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

If you've tried to quit before, you already know something about what does or doesn't work for you. Don't be discouraged if you are still smoking. What you have learned can help you quit now. Many people try to quit smoking several times before they quit for good.

No matter how you decide to quit, preparing yourself will make it easier. Be ready for three stages: before, during and after quitting.

Stage 1: Before You Quit

- Make a list of the reasons you want to quit. Keep your list handy so that you can look at it whenever you feel like smoking.
- Know your smoking habits. Where do you usually smoke? What makes you want to smoke? What will you miss about smoking?
- Find alternatives. Figure out what you can do instead of smoking. For example, if smoking calms you, think of other things that help you relax, such as listening to music or taking a walk.
- Pick a day to quit when you will be less tempted to smoke. If you usually smoke at work, quit when you are at home.
- Talk with people who have quit. Ask them how long it took before they stopped craving cigarettes.

Stage 2: When You Quit

- Throw out all your cigarettes. Get rid of lighters, matches and ashtrays.
- Change your routine to help you avoid situations that made you smoke in the past. For example, if you usually have a cigarette at the dinner table after your meal, leave the table immediately after eating.
- Tell friends and family that you are quitting. Let them help you during tough times. Warn them that you may be in a bad mood.
- Stay away from places where people smoke.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol. They can make you crave cigarettes.
- Focus on today. Thinking about not smoking for the rest of your life may overwhelm you.

Stage 3: After You Quit

- Brace yourself. Many people who quit have a hard time at first. You may be in a bad mood for the first few weeks. You may also feel hungry or tired as your body adjusts to life without cigarettes.
- Keep focusing on today. Every day you don't smoke brings you one step closer to success.
- Keep track of your physical progress. You might notice that you don't wake up coughing or that you can climb stairs without wheezing.
- Reward yourself. Use the money you save by not buying cigarettes for something special. If you used to smoke a pack a day, the money you save after one week could buy a CD or two movie tickets. If you feel the urge to smoke, turn to the three D's: Delay (Wait at least three minutes for the urge to smoke a cigarette to pass); Dampen the urge to smoke (Tell yourself, "I don't want to smoke." Remind yourself why you decided to quit.); and Do something (Take your mind off the urge to smoke by keeping busy. Go for a walk. Call a friend. Listen to music.).