Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Breathe with Pride! Practice Self Love and Plan to Quit Smoking or Cut Down

Quitting smoking is hard, yet millions of people have done it. You can too! As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, you may have been through a lot in your life. Use the strength you gained along the way to help you quit or cut down on smoking.

The rates of smoking in the LGBTQ+ community are higher than other groups of people. There is a long history of the tobacco industry targeting the LGBTQ+ community to start smoking. We encourage you to make healthy choices by taking the first steps to quit or cut down.

If you have HIV, you're at a higher risk for getting some types of cancer. Smoking raises that risk.

Let's change together, as a community, and for the

community, to be the healthiest version of ourselves. Finding your reason to quit is the first step.

It's never too late to quit. You may need to try many times. If you're not ready to quit completely, cutting down is a good way to start.

Find Your Reasons for Quitting

Learning about the health benefits of quitting smoking is enough to motivate many people to quit. You may have other powerful reasons. It's a big decision to quit smoking, so do it for reasons that really matter to you.

Here are some common reasons people start taking steps to quit smoking. You may want to quit smoking or start cutting down because:

- I want to have more energy.
- I know my loved ones want the best for me.
- I research what's best for my pets, so I should make the same effort to improve my own health.
- My partner will be proud to hear I'm not smoking, and that our future together includes making healthy choices.
- I want to set a good example for my family, friends, children, and my community.

- Smoking is expensive.
- Smoking smells bad.
- Smoking causes yellow teeth and unhealthy gums.
- I want freedom from tobacco addiction.
- Most of my friends and family have already quit.
- I want to see my children and grandchildren grow up.

Know the Health Benefits of Quitting

Quitting or cutting back is good for your health no matter how long you've been smoking. Here are some of the health benefits you'll get starting just 20 minutes after you quit!

Amount of Time	Health Benefits
20 minutes after quitting	• Your heart rate and blood pressure drop. • The temperature of your hands and feet increases to a normal level.
8 hours after quitting	• The carbon monoxide (a toxic gas released into your bloodstream when you smoke cigarettes) level in your blood drops to normal.
24 hours after quitting	• Your risk of having a heart attack begins to drop.

2 weeks to 3 months after quitting	• Your blood circulation improves. • Your lungs start working up to 30% better.
1 to 9 months after quitting	• Your coughing, sinus congestion, and shortness of breath decrease. • You have more energy. • Your risk of getting an infection is reduced.
1 year after quitting	• Your risk of heart disease is lower.
5 to 15 years after quitting	• Your risk of having a stroke is the same as a nonsmoker, which is 4 times lower than it was when you were smoking.
10 years after quitting	• Your risk of dying from lung cancer is 50% lower than that of a person who continues to smoke. • Your risk of getting cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas is lower.
15 years after quitting	• Your risk of heart disease is the same as a nonsmoker's risk.

Get Yourself Ready to Quit

The National Cancer Institute recommends the START approach to stop smoking. When you're ready, use these steps to prepare yourself.

S = Set a quit date (the actual day you will stop smoking).

T = Tell family, friends, and coworkers you plan to quit and when.

A = Anticipate and plan for the challenges you may face while quitting.

R = Remove cigarettes and other tobacco products from your home, car, and work.

T = Talk with your healthcare provider about quitting.

Know What Triggers You to Smoke

Before you cut down, it's important to know what makes you want to smoke. If you're like most people, you have triggers and routines that set you off or "tell" you to smoke. What are your triggers? Here's a list to think about:

- Drinking alcohol
- Being bored
- Coffee
- Meals
- Talking on the phone
- Using a computer
- Being around other smokers
- Stress

- Driving
- Going out to bars and clubs

Your smoking triggers don't have to control you. Take steps to notice your triggers and stop them before they happen. Try replacing smoking with something else whenever you have an urge. Here are some habits you can try in place of smoking:

- Chewing gum in the car if driving is a trigger for you.
- Practice slow, deep breathing when you're feeling stressed and want to smoke.
- If your morning coffee makes you want to smoke, try squeezing a handball or drinking tea.

Try different things to manage your triggers until you find what works for you.

Learn How to Cope with Your Smoking Urges

You can change your level of stress, mood, and even your behavior. Learn to manage your thoughts. Negative thoughts can make you feel more sad, worried, or depressed. Try to think positive thoughts to lower your stress level. You can talk yourself into or out of smoking.

Use these tips to help change your thinking about smoking and quitting.

Instead of saying to yourself…	Try saying something like…
“This is just too hard. I can’t quit smoking.”	“I was hooked, but now I’m learning how to live life without smoking. This may seem hard now, but I’m making progress 1 step at a time.”
“Why bother? I don’t really see the point of quitting anyway.”	“My reasons to quit are very important to me. I have come a long way, and I will continue with my progress. I can take this 1 day at a time as long as I remember my reasons and know I’m supported.”
“Things will get better after I have a cigarette.”	“Cigarettes don’t make things better. They don’t solve any of my problems. I can find other ways to cope.”

There are medications available to help you cope with smoking urges. They can raise your chances of quitting or cutting down.

Nicotine in cigarettes makes them addictive. It’s the ingredient that makes it feel good to smoke. But nicotine is not the most harmful part of cigarettes. Carbon monoxide, tar, and other toxic chemicals in cigarettes harm your health.

MSK generally recommends using medication for around 3 months. These drugs will help you with your discomfort

while you get used to life without cigarettes.

Specialists in the MSK Tobacco Treatment Program will talk with you about which medications are right for you. If you decide to take them, we can give you prescriptions for these medications.

Talk with Your Healthcare Provider About Quitting

Talk about what challenges you expect and your concerns about quitting or cutting down. They can give you advice. They can talk with you about resources that can help, including meeting with a tobacco treatment specialist. This is a healthcare provider with special training in helping people quit smoking.

Contact MSK's Tobacco Treatment Program for help with quitting. Call 212-610-0507 or visit www.mskcc.org/tobacco-treatment

Get Screened for Lung Cancer

Smoking is the main risk factor for lung cancer. Knowing your risk for getting lung cancer will help you decide whether screening is right for you. A risk factor is anything that increases your chance of getting a disease, such as cancer.

See if you are eligible for a lung cancer screening with MSK's 2-minute quiz at www.mskcc.org/lung-screening

Actions to Start Taking When You're Ready

- Find your reasons for quitting or cutting down.
- Learn about the health benefits of quitting.
- Set a plan for yourself.
- Talk to your healthcare provider and find a tobacco treatment program.
- Take the lung cancer screening quiz.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Breathe with Pride! Practice Self Love and Plan to Quit Smoking or Cut Down - Last updated on May 21, 2023
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center