PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Making a Plan to Quit or Cut Down on Smoking

Quitting smoking is hard, yet millions of people have done it. You can too! Finding your reason to quit is the first step.

It's never too late to quit, and you might 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

Knowing the health benefits of quitting smoking is enough to motivate many people to quit, but you may have other powerful reasons. Quitting smoking is a big decision, so it's important to do it for reasons that truly 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:

- You want to have more energy.
- You're tired of fighting with family and friends about smoking.

- You don’t want your children to smoke.
- Smoking is expensive.
- Smoking smells bad.
- Smoking causes yellow teeth and unhealthy gums.
- You want freedom from tobacco addiction.
- Most of your friends have already quit.
- You want to see your children and grandchildren grow up.
- You don’t want your family to worry so much about your health.

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

Knowing what makes you want to smoke is an important part of cutting down. 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

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. For example, try chewing gum in the car if driving is a trigger for you. Another example is to 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 by learning to manage your thoughts. Having negative thoughts can make you feel more sad, worried, or depressed. Try to lower your stress level by thinking positive thoughts. 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 may have been hooked, but now I'm learning how to live life without smoking. This is hard, and I'm making progress one step at a time."
"Why bother? I don't really see the point of quitting anyway."	"I decided to quit for some good reasons. I know the benefits of quitting, and I want to do everything I can to be successful. I have come a long way, and I will make it."
"Things will get better after I have a cigarette."	"Cigarettes don't make things better, they just provide a brief escape. Smoking won't solve this or any problem. I can find other ways to improve my situation."

To help you cope with smoking urges, there are 7 FDA-approved cessation medications available to try. These medications can triple your chances of quitting or cutting down. In cigarettes, nicotine is the addictive part (ingredient that makes it feel good to smoke). But nicotine is not the most harmful part of cigarettes. There is also carbon monoxide, tar, and other toxic chemicals in cigarettes that cause damage to your health.

MSK generally recommends using medication for around 3 months to reduce discomfort associated with acute nicotine withdrawal while you get used to life without cigarettes. Specialists in the MSK Tobacco Treatment Program will help you decide which medications are right for you and can provide prescriptions if necessary.

Talk with Your Healthcare Provider About Quitting

Talk with your healthcare provider about what challenges you expect and your concerns about quitting or cutting down. They can give you advice and tell you about resources that can help you, including meeting with a tobacco treatment specialist (a special healthcare provider trained in helping people quit smoking) to help you with your quitting efforts.

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.

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