



# MDwise

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## Quitting Smoking

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### Topic Overview

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#### Is this topic for you?

In this topic, you'll find strategies for quitting smoking and staying smoke-free. Find where you want to go now:

- Are you **Ready to Quit Today?**
- Are you **Thinking About Quitting?**
- Are you **Dealing With Relapse?**
- Are you **Trying to Quit Smokeless Tobacco?**

#### Are you ready to quit?

Maybe you have already taken your last puff or are **ready to quit today**. That's great. This information will help you keep your resolve to kick the habit for good.

Or maybe you **want to plan ahead** before you quit. How ready are you to quit? To find out, use the Interactive Tool: [Are You Ready to Quit Smoking?](#)

It's okay if you aren't ready now. But you may want to quit at some point. So keep learning and preparing yourself. Many smokers do quit. You can too.

#### Why do you want to quit?

**Think about why you want to quit.** Maybe you want to protect your heart and your health and live longer. Or maybe you want to be a good role model for your kids or spend your money on something besides cigarettes. Your reason for wanting to change is important. If your reason comes from you—and not someone else—it will be easier for you to try to quit for good.

Find out how smoking can affect you:

- How Does Smoking Affect Your Lifespan?

## How can you quit?

Quitting smoking is hard. Some people who have quit say that it was the hardest thing they have ever done. But most smokers eventually are able to quit smoking. And you don't have to do it alone. Ask your family, friends, and doctor to help you. Get what you need to help you quit for good.

- **Get ready.** If you're ready to quit right now, go ahead. Medicines and support can help you stay on track. But if you want to plan ahead, you don't have to stop right away. Set a date to quit. Pick a time when you won't have a lot of stress in your life. Think about cutting down on smoking before your quit date. You can try to decrease the number of cigarettes you smoke each day as a way to quit smoking. Get rid of ashtrays, lighters, or spit cups before you quit. Talk to your partner or friends about helping you stay smoke-free. Don't let people smoke in your house.
- **Change your routine.** For example, if you smoke after eating, take a walk instead.
- **Use medicine.** It can help with cravings and stress, and it **doubles your chances** of quitting smoking.<sup>1</sup> You can buy nicotine gum, lozenges, or patches (See figure 1 in appendix) without a prescription. Your doctor may also prescribe medicine, such as bupropion (Zyban) or varenicline (Chantix). If you take varenicline, you can stop smoking a little bit at a time, which may increase your chance of quitting.
- **Get support.** Seek help from:
  - The national tobacco quitline: 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669).
  - Free smartphone, tablet, or handheld computer apps, such as the National Cancer Institute's QuitPal.
  - A text messaging program from [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov) called SmokefreeTXT.
  - Internet programs, such as [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov), which also have chat rooms.
  - Doctors, nurses, or therapists for counseling.
  - A friend who has quit smoking.

After you quit, try not to smoke at all—not even one puff. Prevent a slip (smoking one or two cigarettes) or relapse (returning to regular smoking) by avoiding smoking triggers, at least at first. These triggers can include friends who smoke, alcohol, and stress. Don't keep cigarettes in your house or car. If you do slip, stay calm. Remind yourself that you have a plan, and think about how hard you've worked to quit for good.

## Why is it so hard to quit?

Quitting is hard because your body depends on the nicotine in tobacco. Giving it up is more than just kicking a bad habit. Your body has to stop craving the nicotine. Nicotine gum, lozenges, patches, and other medicines can help reduce the cravings without the harmful effects of smoking.

You also have to change your habits. You may not even think about smoking. You just do it. You may not realize it, but seeing someone smoke—or just seeing cigarettes—may cause you to want to smoke. You may smoke when you drink alcohol or when you are stressed. Or maybe you have a cigarette with coffee. Before you quit, think of new ways to handle these things. For example, call a friend or practice deep breathing when you feel stressed. Try chewing sugarless gum instead of smoking. Go for a walk when you have a break at work. When you first start your quit, it's okay to stay around nonsmokers. And it's okay to avoid situations where you may be tempted to smoke (like occasions where alcohol will be served) until you feel more confident about staying smoke-free.

## What if you feel bad when you are trying to quit?

You are likely to crave cigarettes and to have withdrawal symptoms. You may feel grouchy or restless or you

may have a hard time concentrating for the first 2 to 3 weeks after you quit. It may be hard to focus on tasks. Or you may have trouble sleeping and want to eat more. But you won't feel bad forever, and medicine can help. Using medicines and products like nicotine gum or patches can help with cravings and make it easier to resist smoking.

## Will you gain weight?

You may worry about gaining weight after you stop smoking. This is understandable. In fact, many smokers do gain weight during their quit attempt. In your plan to quit smoking, include eating healthy snacks and doing some physical activity to help you avoid weight gain during your quit.

If you do gain weight, you can focus on losing it after you have successfully quit smoking. Be patient with yourself and try to tackle one change at a time.

You can take steps to lower your chance of gaining weight:

- Try to be active. Exercise can also improve your mood and reduce your craving for a cigarette.
  - If you haven't been getting much exercise, start walking every day, gradually increasing how far you walk. Or take a beginning yoga class.
  - If you are already active, see about joining others for a sport you enjoy, such as biking, hiking, or playing volleyball.
- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and eat fewer high-fat foods. Cutting back on food (dieting) can make quitting smoking harder.
- Try not to substitute food for cigarettes. Instead, chew gum, or chew on a drinking straw or a coffee stirrer.

Use quit-smoking medicines or nicotine replacement. They may make gaining weight less likely while you are quitting smoking.

## What if you start smoking again?

Most people quit and restart many times before they stop smoking for good. If you start smoking again after you quit, don't give up. If you return to smoking, but smoke less than before, try to keep your smoking at that lower level so it will be easier to quit in the future. Also, if you are ready to try to quit again soon, do so. You do not need to wait to try again. Each time you quit, even if it is just for a short time, you get closer to your long-term goal.

Remind yourself that by quitting you may avoid serious health problems and live longer. Remember your reasons for quitting. Maybe you want to protect your heart and your health and live longer.

Each time you quit, you learn more about what helps and what gets in the way. Think about why you started smoking again and about what you will do differently next time. If you tried to quit without medicines or counseling, think about trying them next time. If you did use a medicine and counseling, think about trying a different type next time, or think about changing other things in your life, like travel routines and recreation.

Medicines and nicotine replacement (gum, patches, lozenges) can **double your chances** of success.<sup>1</sup> And using medicines and counseling is even more effective. You can do it!

## Credits

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## Appendix

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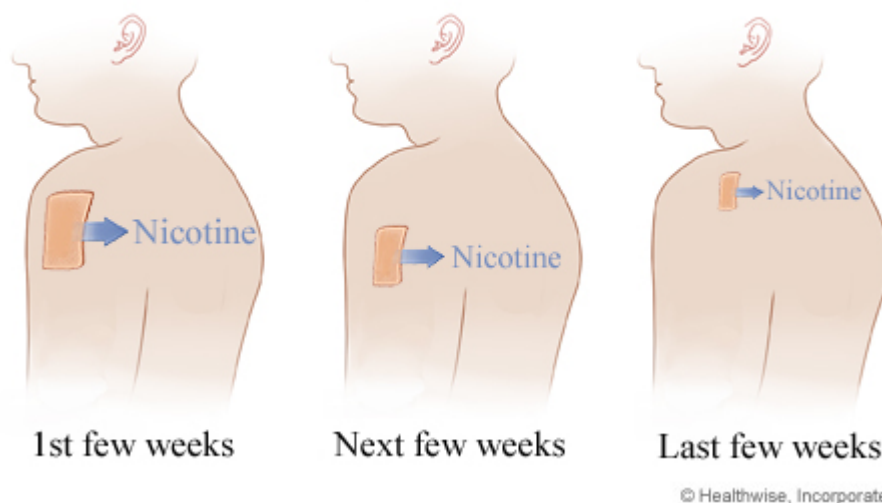
### Topic Images

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Figure 1

#### Nicotine Patch Use

Nicotine patch size/strength is reduced over time.  
Location is changed to avoid skin irritation.



A nicotine patch sticks to your skin and slowly releases nicotine into your bloodstream. Many kits come with different-sized patches that vary in nicotine strength. For the first few weeks, use a large patch. Then use medium-sized patches for the next few weeks, and use the smallest patches-which contain the least nicotine-during the last few weeks. Replace the patch daily. Choose a clean, hairless place on the skin between the neck and the waist, such as the upper arm, the shoulder, or the back. To help avoid skin irritation, do not apply the patch to the same place every time.

By using the patch, you can taper off your smoking or your use of smokeless tobacco. The patch can help relieve your withdrawal symptoms. And after about 8 to 10 weeks, you stop using the patch completely.

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Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.

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