



**World Health
Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

How and why to quit smoking



The health benefits of quitting

Giving up smoking has some immediate and long-term benefits for all smokers.

1

AFTER

20 minutes

- Blood pressure and heart rate drop

8 hours

- Nicotine levels in the bloodstream fall to 6.25% of normal peak daily levels (a 93.25% drop)

12 hours

- Carbon monoxide levels drop to normal
- Oxygen levels in the bloodstream increase to normal

24 hours

- Nicotine levels in the bloodstream are now gone

48 to 72 hours

- Nerve endings start growing again
- Sense of smell and taste begin to improve
- Alveoli (lung bronchial tubes leading to air sacs) begin to relax
- Breathing is easier and lungs are functioning better
- Entire body is 100% nicotine free
- Over 90% of all nicotine metabolites (the chemicals it breaks down into) will have passed through the urine

10 days to 2 weeks

- Blood circulation in gums and teeth is now similar to nonsmokers

2 to 4 weeks

- Cessation related anger, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, impatience, insomnia, restlessness and depression end

2 weeks to 3 months

- Circulation improves
 - Walking gets easier
 - Lung function improves up to 30%
 - Skin appearance improves as it loses the grayish pallor and becomes less wrinkled
 - Chronic cough disappears
 - Risk of heart attack falls

1 to 9 months

- Cilia (small hairs) grow back in lungs to better handle mucus, clean the lungs and reduce infection
- Coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue and shortness of breath decrease
- Colds, soar throats and headaches decrease
- Overall energy and concentration levels increase

1 year

- Risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker
- Risk of premature death from heart attack decreases

5 years

- Risk of stroke becomes the same as nonsmokers

10 years

- Risk of death from lung cancer goes down by almost half for an average smoker (one pack per day)
- Risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, bladder, kidney and pancreas goes down

15 years

- Risk of coronary heart disease equals that of nonsmokers

2

Giving up smoking is beneficial for smokers across all age groups, even those suffering from smoking related health problems.

Age group	Benefits for quitters versus continuing smokers
At about 30	Gain almost 10 years of life expectancy
At about 40	Gain 9 years of life expectancy
At about 50	Gain 6 years of life expectancy
At about 60	Gain 3 years of life expectancy
After the onset of life threatening disease	Rapid benefit! People who quit smoking after having a heart attack reduce their chances of having another heart attack by 50%

3

Giving up smoking decreases the high risk of many diseases related to secondhand smoke in children, such as respiratory diseases (e.g. asthma) and ear infections.

4

Giving up smoking reduces the risk of impotence, experiencing difficulty getting pregnant, premature births, low birth weight babies and miscarriage.

Sources:

1. www.quit tobacco.org/whyquit/physicalbenefits.html
2. www.whyquit.com/whyquit/A_Benefits_Time_Table.html
3. www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Smoking_the_financial_cost?OpenDocument
4. Doll R, Peto R, Boreham J, Sutherland I. Mortality in relation to smoking: 50 years' observations on male British doctors. *British Medical Journal*, 2004, 328(7455):1519-1527.
5. US Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General*. US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2004.

How to quit

Nicotine is highly addictive, leading those trying to quit smoking down a path of physical and psychological hardship. Kicking the habit, though not easy is not impossible either. Through determination, will power and the practical strategies listed below, anything is possible.

If you are not willing to make a quit attempt now, please consider the following advice:

- Think about the impact of tobacco use on your family and yourself.
- Read about quitting benefits and effective strategies.
- Ask your health care provider or call the quitline (if available in your country) for advice and information.
- Ask an ex-smoker to share his or her ideas and success.
- Believe in yourself and gain quit experience.

If you are willing to make a quit attempt now, please consider the following STAR strategies:

- Set a quit date, within 2 weeks to give up smoking completely.
- Tell family, friends and co-workers about this quitting attempt and seek their understanding and support.
- Anticipate challenges to the upcoming quit attempt and be prepared to address them.
- Remove tobacco products from your environment. Make your home smoke free.

During the first few weeks of your quit attempt, please consider the following eight steps to help reduce your nicotine cravings and other withdrawal symptoms:

- 1. Drink a lot of liquids, especially water.** Try herbal teas or fruit juices. Limit coffee, soft drinks and alcohol as they can increase your urge to smoke.
- 2. Avoid sweet and fatty foods.** Try low calorie foods for snacking, such as carrots and other vegetables, sugarless gum, air popped popcorn or low fat cottage cheese. Do not skip meals.
- 3. Exercise regularly and moderately.** Regular exercise helps. Joining an exercise group provides a healthy activity and a new routine.
- 4. Get more sleep.** Try to go to sleep early and get more rest.
- 5. Take deep breaths.** Distract yourself. When cravings hit, do something else immediately, such as talking to someone, getting busy with a task, or taking deep breaths.
- 6. Change your habits.** Take a different route to work, eat breakfast in a different place, or get up from the table immediately after eating.
- 7. Use nicotine replacement therapy and other effective pharmacological products in consultation with a doctor.**
- 8. Satisfy your psychological needs:**
 - a. remind yourself every day why you are quitting;
 - b. avoid places you link with smoking;
 - c. develop a plan for relieving stress;
 - d. listen to relaxing music;
 - e. watch a funny movie;
 - f. take your mind off a problem and come back to it later;
 - g. rely on your friends, family and support group for help;
 - h. avoid alcohol as it lowers your chances for success.

Sources:

1. <http://quitsmoking.about.com/cs/yourfirstweek/a/tipsfirstweek.htm>.
2. US Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service. *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence, Clinical Practice Guideline*, 2008 update.