



Ten Steps to Stop Smoking

Smoking remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. Nonetheless, as any smoker knows, quitting isn't an easy thing to do. Here are ten steps to help you kick the habit.

1. Understand your addiction

Learning why you smoke will help you better understand what it takes to quit. Nicotine alters the balance of chemicals in your brain, rapidly causing changes in your mood and concentration. The more you smoke, the more accustomed your brain becomes to the nicotine and the more you have to smoke to get the same "rush."

2. Remind yourself that quitting can save your life

The benefits of kicking the smoking habit start as early as 20 minutes after your last puff with noticeable decreases in your blood pressure and pulse rate, and the positive effects continue in the weeks, months, and years that follow. Quitting smoking cuts the risk of cancers, heart disease, stroke, lung diseases, and other respiratory illnesses.

3. Understand how your habit affects others

Secondhand smoke is responsible for tens of thousands of deaths among non-smokers every year, and it doesn't take much exposure to have an effect: even low levels of secondhand smoke can damage a non-smoker's health.

4. Make a list of the benefits

Quitting smoking delivers immediate results. Make a list of a few and keep it with you. You can taste and smell food better. Your breath smells better. Your cough goes away. Ex-smokers have fewer days of illness, fewer health complaints, and less bronchitis and pneumonia than current smokers. Quitting smoking saves you money: a pack-a-day smoker can expect to save more than \$700 per year.

5. Ask for support

Ask your family and friends to support your decision to quit. Ask them to be completely supportive and non-judgmental. Let them know ahead of time that you will probably be irritable and even irrational while you withdraw from your smoking habit. Verbalizing your commitment makes you more likely to keep your promise.

Also, talk with your doctor. Support and guidance from a physician is a proven way to better your chances of quitting.

6. Set a quit date

Decide what day you will extinguish your cigarettes forever. Plan for it. You might even hold a small ceremony when you smoke your last cigarette, or on the morning of the quit date.

7. Wait

When you start craving a cigarette, wait a few minutes. Try to think of something to do instead of smoking, like chewing gum or drinking a glass of water. Plus, water helps flush the nicotine and other chemicals out of your body.

8. Begin an exercise program

Exercise relieves stress and helps your body recover from years of damage from cigarettes. If necessary, start slow, with a short walk once or twice per day. Build up to 30 to 40 minutes of rigorous activity, 3 or 4 times per week. Consult your physician before beginning any exercise program.

9. Team up

Find another smoker who is trying to quit and encourage each other. Knowing that someone else is depending on your positive reinforcement will help you stay in line.

10. Reward yourself

After you quit, plan to celebrate the milestones in your journey to becoming a non-smoker. After two weeks of being smoke-free, see a movie. After a month, go to a fancy restaurant. After three months, go for a long weekend to a favorite getaway. Continue to celebrate your new chance at a long, healthy life.