

Smoking and Women's Health: Tips on Why and How to Quit



What does smoking do to my body?

Smoking is the number one cause of heart attack and cancer in women. Smoking hurts almost every organ in your body. It affects your general health and causes many diseases. About 1 out of every 5 deaths in the United States is linked to smoking. When you smoke, your blood vessels narrow. This doubles your chance of having a heart attack and/or stroke. Smoking causes at least 12 different kinds of cancer and many different diseases of the lungs. You also get yellow teeth, have more wrinkles, increase your chances of developing cervical cancer, and decrease the strength of your bones when you smoke for many years.

What should I do first when I decide I want to quit?

S = Set a quit date.

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

A = Anticipate the struggles you will face.

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

T = Talk to your health care provider about help.

Can't I just take medicine to quit?

Many women quit smoking without taking medication. But if you have tried several times and find you can't stop, there are several different types of medicines that can increase your chances of quitting. Most of the drugs belong to a group called nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). Gum, patches, and lozenges you suck on are examples of NRT that you can buy without a prescription. There are also nasal spray and inhaler NRTs, but you need a prescription to get these products. There are also some drugs that take the place of the nicotine from cigarettes and can help lower your cravings to smoke. Bupropion SR (Wellbutrin, Zyban) and varenicline (Chantix) are prescription medicines that do not contain nicotine. They lessen withdrawal symptoms and help decrease the urge to smoke. The risks and benefits of using any of these medicines should be discussed with your health care provider.

What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding and want to quit smoking?

Quitting smoking when you are in the first part of pregnancy is one of the best and easiest times in life to quit smoking for good. It helps to quit at any time during your pregnancy, but it is best to quit before you get pregnant. When you smoke, you are more likely to have trouble getting pregnant, have a baby early, have a small baby, and have the baby die before birth. A newborn that is around a lot of cigarette smoke is more likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Your baby also may be cranky and get sick more often, and, in rare instances, these children can have problems learning. One-on-one counseling is considered the safest and most helpful way to quit smoking while you are pregnant. Nicotine replacement therapy products can be used while you are pregnant and breastfeeding, but you should discuss this with your health care provider. There are some small risks, but using NRT is much less dangerous to you and the baby than smoking. Also, set a goal or reward for yourself. For example, if you quit smoking by a certain date for a certain length of time, use your cigarette money to buy yourself something special. Even cutting down the number of cigarettes you smoke each day can really help improve your health and the health of your baby.

What can I do to help myself quit, and how can I handle withdrawal symptoms?

Common Reasons Women Have Trouble Quitting Smoking	Solutions
Lack of support	Find a friend you can call when you need a cigarette. Talk to a counselor or find a support group to join.
Weight gain	Eat a low-calorie diet, do some exercise most days of the week, and/or work with a therapist to train your body on how to handle cravings for a cigarette.
Living with people who smoke	Ask the people you live with to help you quit. Give them specific ways they can help you like not buying you cigarettes or not smoking around you.
Feeling irritable, depressed, and/or nervous	Do meditation or slow, deep breathing. Take a walk or exercise. Take a hot bath.
Nicotine cravings	Chew gum, suck on hard candy, or chew on vegetables, fruits, or nuts. Remember, these symptoms will become less over time.
Being bored	Have planned activities. Stay busy!
Cravings	Avoid doing things and going to places that will increase your desire to smoke, like drinking alcohol, spending time at places that you used to smoke, or spending time around other people who smoke.

Remember... YOU CAN DO IT!

Quitting isn't easy. Sometimes it takes more than 1 try to quit smoking for good. Each time you try to quit, you learn something new. So if you do not succeed on the first or second try, don't stop trying. Remember that it can be done, and many other people have quit smoking.

For More Information

These Web sites have many tools to help you quit smoking today and deal with challenges that you may face.

www.smokefree.gov

www.quitnet.com

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/smoking

Call the quit smoking hotline for support: 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

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