

TOBACCO ADDICTION & QUITTING

Starting to smoke

We've already seen that smoking brings much ill-health and causes many deaths. Every year, tobacco kills around 19,000 men and women,¹ while another 150,000 Australians quit smoking for good.² What keeps tobacco companies in business is the fact that new people - mostly young people - start smoking every day. This TAP unit looks at why people start to smoke, the factors which make them keep on smoking, and ways of quitting smoking.

Why smoke?

If smoking is so bad for you, you might wonder why people take it up at all. There are many influences on why people start smoking. People are more likely to start smoking if their parents or brothers or sisters smoke, or if their friends are smokers.^{3,4,5,6} Perhaps they think that everyone smokes, and that they will be left out if they don't do it too. Others might feel that smoking makes them look and feel grown up. Having enough spare cash to afford to buy cigarettes is also a factor in whether or not people smoke.⁴

People who have a positive attitude to smoking, and find tobacco advertising appealing,^{4,6} are also more likely to take it up. Over the years the tobacco companies have worked hard to make their products look attractive to young people, and there is much evidence that young people have been influenced by cigarette advertising.^{4,6,7,8,9,10,11,12} (See also TAP 7)

Some people begin smoking when they start working or go to college,¹³ but most people who are going to smoke, begin while they are teenagers.¹⁴ Perhaps younger people think that smoking only causes problems for old people. This is not true (see TAP 4). And the bad news is that if you start smoking young, you are more likely to smoke heavily,¹⁵ and less likely to quit.¹⁶ This means that you are more likely to develop serious health problems from smoking.^{17,18,19}

Keeping it up ...

Nicotine, which occurs naturally in tobacco plants, is the drug that makes smokers want to keep on smoking. Research has shown that, like cocaine and heroin, nicotine is addictive.²⁰ This means that when people start smoking regularly, they usually become dependent on smoking. Once the body gets used to working with nicotine, it feels a need to keep on getting nicotine. Over time smokers might progress from having one or two cigarettes a week, or just smoking at parties, to smoking a pack a day.

Not smoking can bring on withdrawal symptoms. These can be physical and emotional changes. Some people feel dizzy, or get headaches, or become irritable. Others might feel shaky, or have aches and pains, or cough more than usual. These are all signs that their body is getting used to living without nicotine, and starting to recover from its bad effects.²¹ You can find out more about nicotine by reading TAP 2 and TAP 4.

Habit or addiction?

The answer is both. As well as being a physical addiction, smoking can also become part of the daily routine.

Having a coffee break, talking on the telephone, doing a difficult task or even just doing nothing much at all, might each be a signal for the smoker to light up. When having a cigarette has become a part of a smoker's lifestyle, smoking has become a habit as well as an addiction.

Deciding to quit

Most smokers would like to quit.^{22,23} They are aware of the health problems it causes them and the people around them, and the amount of their money that goes up in smoke.^{24,25,26}

The most important thing a quitter has to do is decide that they want to quit, and to be confident that they can succeed. The next step is to plan the best way of doing it. Someone who wants to quit might find it useful to think about why and when they smoke, and to work out ways to tackle urges to smoke, and handle the pressure others might put on them to keep on smoking.

Those smokers who think smoking relaxes them, can look for other ways of relaxing, or dealing with pressure. Someone who sees smoking as a pleasure, can look for other rewards (the extra money saved from not smoking helps).

Many smokers try several times before they manage to quit for good.²¹ Having a cigarette does not have to mean failure: set-backs can be learnt from, and help the smoker succeed next time.

Many successful ex-smokers have had the support of family or friends when they are trying to quit. This goes a long way in helping them to feel positive and confident. On the other hand, being given unwanted advice or being pressured to quit makes it harder for a smoker to succeed.

But I'll put on weight!

As we've seen from TAP 2, one of the effects of nicotine is that it can influence body weight. Smokers tend to weigh less than non-smokers, and some are afraid that if they give up smoking, they'll get fat. What usually happens is that people who quit smoking end up being the weight that they would have been if they never smoked^{27,28} - the average quitter gains around 2.3 kg.²¹ Gaining a little bit of weight is far more healthy than smoking^{21,28} - it's hard to imagine a more dangerous slimming aid than cigarettes! Eating good food and exercising regularly are the best ways of controlling weight, and can be made a part of a quit plan.

Ways of quitting

Cold turkey

Most smokers quit by 'going cold turkey'. This means stopping smoking suddenly and completely. For most people, this is the most successful way.^{17,29}

Reducing

Other smokers prefer to cut down the number of cigarettes they smoke each day. By rationing out their cigarettes, or using a delaying tactic that means they wait until much later each day before they have a cigarette, they gradually cut out smoking altogether.

Cessation courses

Some smokers find it helpful to attend a course that gives them information and group support. Trained counsellors can provide smokers with skills to help them quit.

Nicotine gum and Nicotine patches

Special gum and patches containing nicotine can help smokers get used to not smoking, while keeping withdrawal symptoms under control. Smokers replace their cigarettes completely with the patch or gum, and then are gradually weaned off it.³⁰ Nicotine gum and patches are most useful for people heavily addicted to smoking.³¹ The gum comes in two strengths and the patch in three. Because of the dangers of nicotine, nicotine gum can only be bought at a pharmacy, and the stronger gum and the patch are only available on doctor's prescription.

Acupuncture and hypnosis

Some smokers may find these treatments helpful, but there has been little research on how effective they are in the long term.^{32,33} Both forms of treatment are more likely to succeed if smokers are also offered advice on quitting and follow-up support.

Special 'cures'

Special mouth-washes, mouth sprays, tablets, and even herbal cigarettes are sometimes advertised as ways of helping people stop smoking. None of these products has been shown to be helpful, and some may even be dangerous.³¹

For assistance with quitting, smokers can ring the Quitline on 131 848 for the cost of a local call.

Breathing easy

As you have already read, stopping smoking can bring on withdrawal symptoms. While these may not feel very pleasant, they are a good sign - that the body is learning to do without drugs and is returning to the natural, healthy state it was in before nicotine took over. Stopping smoking brings benefits to people of all ages, even if they are already sick.²¹

After quitting, and as long as serious disease has not already set in, the body of a typical 20-a-day smoker will go through a process of healing something like this:³⁴

- * After two hours, there is no more nicotine in the body, although it will take about two days for nicotine by-products to go.
- * After six hours, heart rate and blood pressure decrease, although it might take up to a month for them to return to their normal rate.
- * After 12 hours, carbon monoxide has left the blood, meaning that the lungs work better and more activity can be done before running short of breath. Lung function will continue to improve over the next few weeks.
- * After two months of not smoking, blood flow to the lungs will have increased, and after three months, the lung's cleaning system will have returned to normal, unless the lungs have already been permanently damaged. Blood flow to the arms and legs will also have improved.
- * After 12 months the chance of dying from heart disease is half that of someone continuing to smoke. It then takes around 15 years for the risk to be as low as someone who never smoked. After 10 years of quitting, lung cancer risk is less than half that of a continuing smoker. The chance of disease continues to decline gradually after that.²¹
- * The risks of getting other kinds of smoking-caused disease will also decline after quitting.²¹

Tobacco Addiction and Quitting - activities

1. Interview a number of smokers and ex-smokers to find out their reasons for smoking, any plans they have for quitting, and if they have already stopped smoking, how they did it. Your questions could include:

- * What do you remember of your first cigarette?
- * Why do/did you keep smoking?
- * How often do/did you smoke?
- * How much do/did cigarettes cost you each week?
- * Would you like to quit?
- * What made you want to quit?

- * Have you ever tried to quit? (How did it go?)
 - * What plans did you make?
 - * What would/did help you to quit?
2. Consider changes you have made in your lifestyle which have had an affect on your health. These might include taking up regular exercise, or training for a particular sport, or improving your diet. Choose one thing that you have changed and consider the following:
- * Why did you make the change?
 - * What influenced you to make the decision?
 - * Did you make the change quickly or over a long period of time?
 - * Was it easy or difficult to make the change and stick to it?
 - * What sorts of things helped you make the change?
 - * What sorts of things made it more difficult?
3. Calculate how much money smokers spend on cigarettes. How much would they save by not smoking in a week, a month, a year? Work out how much that would be in five, ten, and 20 years by investing the money in a savings plan.
4. Develop radio announcements promoting quitting and play them to your class.
5. Consider the following four groups and list the different reasons each may have for wanting to quit:
- * Parents/children
 - * Females/males
 - * Pregnant women/prospective fathers
 - * Students/teachers
6. Think about the different ways people go about quitting. Choose two methods and compare them for:
- * Cost
 - * Difficulties
 - * Benefits
 - * Length of time it takes.

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100 Drummond Street, Carlton, Victoria. PO Box 888 Carlton, Victoria 3053 Australia
Telephone: (03) 9663 7777 Fax: (03) 9635 5510 (International: +61 3 9635 5510) Internet: www.quit.org.au

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