



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FAQ065

WOMEN'S HEALTH

## It's Time to Quit Smoking

- **Why is smoking harmful?**
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- **What can I do to help get through the first day I quit?**
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### Why is smoking harmful?

With each puff of a cigarette, a smoker's body is exposed to more than 2,500 chemicals. Many of these chemicals are known to cause cancer. For instance, cigarettes contain

- nicotine—a highly addictive drug
- carbon monoxide—the poisonous gas in car exhaust fumes
- tar—a gummy substance used to pave roads

Smoking doubles the risk of heart disease and cancer of the **cervix** in women. Women who smoke are 12 times more likely to get lung cancer than women who have never smoked. Smoking increases the risk of many other types of cancer as well.

Smoking is linked with reproductive problems such as **infertility** and early **menopause**. Also, people (especially children) who are around smokers can develop health problems from being exposed to secondhand smoke.

### What first steps can I take if I want to quit smoking?

Follow these steps to help you get started:

- Decide that you want to quit. Try to avoid thinking about how hard it might be. Instead, imagine your life smoke-free.
- Focus on your reasons for quitting—to improve your health, protect your family, or save money. These reasons will help keep you going.
- Tell your family and friends that you plan to stop smoking. Get their support. If they smoke, you may want to ask them to quit too. It may help to have a friend quit with you.
- Know what to expect when you quit. Learn how to handle urges to smoke and the stress that comes along with quitting.
- Set a target date for quitting. Setting a date may make it easier to reach your goal. Your target date can be your birthday, an anniversary, or any other day. Mark the date on your calendar. Having a quit date also will help you keep track of the exact day you became a nonsmoker—a date you can celebrate each year.

### How can nicotine replacement products help me quit?

Nicotine replacement products release nicotine into your body. This can provide relief of cravings and withdrawal symptoms while you get used to life without smoking. They are available in a special chewing gum, skin patch, nasal spray, or inhaler.

### Is medication available to help quit smoking?

Another product your health care provider may suggest to help you quit smoking is bupropion hydrochloride tablets. These tablets are anti-depressants and must be prescribed by your health care provider. This medication helps reduce the urge to smoke and withdrawal symptoms (such as feeling nervous and getting angry over little things). The treatment begins 2 weeks before your quit date. Treatment lasts about 7–12 weeks.

Side effects of this medication include dry mouth, trouble sleeping, feeling shaky, and skin rash. If you are taking another anti-depressant, you should not use these tablets to help you quit smoking.

### What can I do to help get through the first day I quit?

When the target date comes, throw away all your cigarettes. Clean your clothes to get rid of the cigarette smell.

Try to keep busy on your quitting day—exercise, go to the movies, or take long walks. It may help to spend most of your free time in places where smoking is not allowed, such as a library, store, or museum. Remind your family and friends that this is your quitting day. Ask them to help you through the first week or so—it is the hardest.

### What are some rewards of quitting?

Quitting reverses much of the damage caused by smoking. The odor of stale cigarette smoke will begin to fade from your clothes, car, and home. The smoke stains on your fingernails will go away. A person who stops smoking can reduce the risk of heart disease to the same level as someone who has never smoked at all. You will also have the bonus of not spending your money on cigarettes. Reward yourself by buying something special with your savings.

### What are some of the feelings I may experience when I first quit smoking?

The first week after quitting is the hardest time. You may feel irritable, anxious, and hungry. You may have trouble sleeping. You may feel dizzy or drowsy and have headaches.

These feelings are known as withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawal symptoms may begin within a few hours, peak in 2–3 days, and last up to a month.

### I am concerned about gaining weight when I quit. What can I do to avoid gaining weight?

If you are concerned about gaining weight after you quit, make sure you eat right. It is also good to start a regular exercise program. Exercise helps you feel better, keeps your weight down, and may help ease withdrawal symptoms. Using nicotine gum also may help delay or prevent weight gain.

### Glossary

**Cervix:** The lower, narrow end of the uterus, which protrudes into the vagina.

**Infertility:** A condition in which a couple has been unable to get pregnant after 12 months without the use of any form of birth control.

**Menopause:** The process in a woman's life when ovaries stop functioning and menstruation stops.

### If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

**FAQ065:** Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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