



Smoking Cessation

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More than 50 million Americans smoke. People begin smoking for many reasons—stress, social status and peer pressure—but the main reason they continue is addiction to nicotine. Smoking is, in fact, so addictive that some people consider giving up cigarettes harder than quitting an addictive illicit drug. Yet, with determination and support from their friends, family and health care providers, many manage to do it. Talk to your patients about how to stop smoking.

Why should I quit smoking?

- Cigarette smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, and, when inhaled, they merge into a tar-like substance that sticks to the tissues inside the mouth, throat, lungs and stomach.
- The chemicals not only damage the tissues they contact directly, but they also harm the entire body by reducing the amount of well-oxygenated blood that reaches the organs.
- Smoking affects nearly every organ in the body—heart, brain, stomach, bladder, kidneys and even the skin.
- People who smoke also double or triple their risk of developing cataracts.
- Second-hand smoke can cause damage to those around you—even family and friends who choose not to smoke.

What are the benefits of quitting smoking?

- Within one month of quitting, you will decrease your heart rate, the level of carbon monoxide in your blood and your risk of heart attack.
- The long-term benefits include reducing risks for stroke; lung, stomach, bladder and other cancers; coronary heart disease, such as heart attack; chronic lung diseases and chronic cough; stomach ulcers; and peripheral artery disease.
- Within five years of quitting, your risk of stroke is the same as that of a non-smoker.
- In 15 years, your heart attack risk is the same as that of non-smokers of the same age.

How do I quit?

- Make a serious mental commitment.
- Set a quit date.
- Refer to yourself as a non-smoker in the present tense. For example, say, “I am a non-smoker.” Similar affirmations that fit your individual situation may also be helpful.

- Get rid of all cigarettes and smoking accessories (such as ashtrays) in your home, car and other places where you might be tempted to smoke.
- Do not let people smoke in your home. Avoid drinking alcohol, and avoid contact with smokers.
- Get support and encouragement from family, friends, co-workers and former smokers and consider joining a former smokers support group.
- When tempted, perform tasks that could help distract you: Go for a walk, exercise or take a bath.
- Drink lots of fluids, preferably those without caffeine.

What happens when I quit smoking?

- You may find yourself suffering from irritability, nervousness and sleeplessness, and you may feel the need to have something in your mouth or hands.
- Chewing gum or mints can easily substitute for cigarettes.
- Rubber bands, paper clips or other gadgets will help keep your hands busy.
- The side effects pass within a few days, so you will feel better very soon. Do not dwell on these adverse signs and remain focused on the advantages of quitting.

What's the bottom line?

- Smoking is a physical and psychological addiction that is not easy to break.
- Most smokers have to kick the habit more than once to finally quit.
- If you are unsuccessful the first or second time, try again. Don't regard the initial attempts as failures, but as opportunities to find out what works or doesn't work for you. ■



ACA members can download a patient education fact sheet on smoking cessation and 70 other health and wellness topics at www.acatoday.org/HealthyLiving.