

QUITTING SMOKING: THE SINGLE BEST THING YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

This is an excerpt from The Lung Association of Nova Scotia's website (www.ns.lung.ca)

Quitting smoking may be one of the hardest things you'll ever do. But it gets easier with practice. Research shows every time you try to quit, you boost your chances of quitting for good. Quitting smoking is a process that requires careful planning, courage, discipline, and commitment.

Four steps to quitting smoking

1. Pick a quit day: Choose a date within the next two or three weeks to quit. Having a deadline makes it easier to plan how you will handle the people, places and situations that make you want to smoke. Try to choose a time that is not particularly stressful. But don't wait forever for the "perfect" day. Pick a quit date now and work with it.

2. Choose one or more proven quit-smoking methods: Your chances of success are greater if you combine quit methods like counselling, self-help guides, the patch and other medicines. Choose the methods that will work best for you. It also helps to list your reasons for quitting, write down the things that can replace smoking, speak with friends, family, and colleagues who can give you support, start making the lifestyle changes that will support your plan, and consider joining a support group.

3. Work your plan: When it's your quit date be firm that you won't smoke. Review your plan often. Knowing how you're going to handle the urge to smoke will help you better cope with cravings. Avoid those people and situations where you will be tempted to smoke. Go for a walk instead of a smoke. Find a hobby that keeps your hands and mind busy. Clean your teeth, your clothes, and your house of that stale tobacco smell. Be positive and remember you are choosing to be smoke-free.

4. Celebrate your success: Believe in yourself and your plan. Understand that it takes time to re-learn smoke-free habits. Remember that quitting is a process, not an event. Though your recovery begins within hours of your last smoke, it takes at least three weeks to make a new habit. Don't be discouraged if you slip. It's part of the process. You are not a failure. Review your plan and ask yourself how you can do it differently next time. Reward yourself!

Here are some of the most common quit methods:

Support groups/counselling: Most people find it helpful to join a support group, get counselling or read self-help books. This type of support will help you understand what to expect and better cope with withdrawal symptoms. The Lung Association of Nova Scotia can provide more information about support groups and programs offered in your community.

Nicotine replacement therapies: Nicotine replacement therapies come in many different forms: skin patches, gum, sprays and inhalers. They have small amounts of nicotine in them and can help take the edge off cravings. These products work by slowly reducing the amount of nicotine delivered to your body to help you handle withdrawal symptoms more easily. Research shows these are effective in helping people to quit smoking, especially when combined with counselling or self-help.

Antidepressant drugs: Bupropion SR (Zyban) is a prescription antidepressant drug that can reduce the urge to smoke in some people. It's most effective in helping people quit when it's combined with other quit methods like counselling.

Unproven methods to quit smoking include acupuncture, acupressure, electrostimulation, laser therapy and hypnosis or hypnotherapy.

Nicotine withdrawal: Withdrawal is your body's response to being without the drug nicotine. Everyone who quits smoking should expect some withdrawal symptoms. Common withdrawal symptoms include craving for a cigarette, feeling tired, coughing, gas or stomach pain, hunger, headache, feeling irritable (bad mood), and trouble concentrating. Symptoms of withdrawal and how long they last are different for everyone. In general, symptoms begin within hours of stopping smoking and can be worse in the evening. Symptoms tend to decrease over the first 4-5 days. Some people have stronger symptoms than others.

When you have the urge to smoke try the 4-D Solution:

1. **Drink water:** Drink lots of water. This flushes the nicotine and other chemicals out of your system faster. It can help to keep your mouth busy.



2. **Deep breaths:** Take a deep breath break instead of a smoke break. Take a few deep breaths. Hold the last one. Breathe out slowly.

3. **Delay:** As a smoker you were not always in control. You smoked when your body wanted nicotine. By delaying or holding off, you are calling the shots. Often the craving for a cigarette can pass in a few minutes.

4. **Do something different:** When a craving hits, it helps to get out of your current situation. Change what you're doing. Step outside. Call a friend. Read a book. Do something different. Some people find it helpful to do something with their hands when a craving strikes like squeezing a stress ball or knitting.

Here are some other good things that happen to your body once you stop smoking:

Within eight hours: carbon monoxide level drops in your body and oxygen level in your blood increases to normal.

Within 48 hours: your chances of having a heart attack start to go down and your sense of smell and taste begin to improve.

Within 72 hours: your bronchial tubes relax and make breathing easier and your lung capacity increases.

Within two weeks to three months: your blood circulation improves and your lung functioning increases up to 30 percent.

Within six months: your coughing, stuffy nose, tiredness and shortness of breath improve.

Within one year: your risk of smoking-related heart attack is cut in half.

Within 10 years: your risk of dying from lung cancer is cut in half.

Within 15 years: your risk of dying from a heart attack is the same as a person who never smoked.

There are many other good reasons to quit smoking:

- You'll set a good example for your children.
- Your smoking will no longer affect the health of people around you.
- You'll have more money to save or to spend on other things - a pack of cigarettes a day adds up to more than \$3,000 a year!
- You'll have more energy to do the things you love.
- You'll pay lower life insurance premiums.
- Cigarettes will no longer control your life.

What are your reasons to quit smoking? Write them down and share them with friends and family or post them on the fridge.

References

1. Health Canada, Tobacco Control Program. On the Road to Quitting - Guide to Becoming a Non-Smoker 2003.

**did you
KNOW?**

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at Be_Well@nstu.ca.

Please contact Erin at ekeefe@nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address. The Be_Well@nstu.ca list will provide information about the EIP and other wellness topics.

