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Deciding to Quit Smoking and Making a Plan

Smokers often say, “Don’t tell me why to quit, tell me how.” There’s no one right way to quit, but there are some requirements for quitting with success. Key steps for quitting are covered here.

Make the decision to quit smoking

The decision to quit smoking is one that only you can make. Others may want you to quit, but the real commitment must come from you.

Think about why you want to quit.

- Are you worried that you could get a [smoking-related disease](#)¹?
- Do you really believe that the [benefits of quitting](#)² outweigh the benefits of continuing to smoke?
- Do you know someone who has had health problems because of smoking?
- Are you ready to make a serious try at quitting?

Write down your reasons so you can look at them every time you want to smoke.

If you’re ready to quit, setting a date and deciding on a plan will help move you to the next step.

Set a date and make a quit smoking plan

What’s important about picking a Quit Day?

Once you've decided to quit, you're ready to pick a quit date. This is a key step. Pick a day within the next month as your Quit Day. Picking a date too far away gives you time to change your mind. Still, you need to give yourself enough time to prepare. You might choose a date with a special meaning like a birthday or anniversary, or the date of the [Great American Smokeout](#)³ (the third Thursday in November each year). Or you might want to just pick a random date. Circle the date on your calendar. Make a strong, personal commitment to quit on that day.

How do you plan to quit?

There are many ways to quit, and some work better than others. [Nicotine replacement therapy](#)⁴, [prescription drugs](#)⁵, and [other methods](#)⁶ are available. Learn more about ways to quit so you can find the method that best suits you. It's also a good idea to talk to your doctor or dentist, and get their advice and support.

[Support](#)⁷ is another key part of your plan. Stop-smoking programs, telephone quit lines, Nicotine Anonymous meetings, self-help materials such as books and pamphlets, and smoking counselors can be a great help. Also tell your family, friends, and co-workers that you're quitting. They can give you help and encouragement, which increases your chances of quitting for good.

For the best chance at success, your plan should include at least 2 of these options.

Do quit smoking programs really work?

As you make your quit plan, you may wonder about success rates of the many different methods available. Success rates are hard to figure out for many reasons. First, not all programs define success in the same way. Does success mean that a person isn't smoking at the end of the program? After 3 months? 6 months? 1 year? Does smoking fewer cigarettes (rather than stopping completely) count as success? If a method you're considering claims a certain success rate, ask for more details on how success is defined and what kind of follow-up is done to confirm the rate.

It's important to remember that quitting is hard. Quit smoking programs in general seem to have fairly low success rates, but they can still be worthwhile. Only about 4% to 7% of people are able to quit smoking on any given attempt without medicines or other help. Finding a program that fits your needs can make a difference.

What can I do to increase my chances of quitting?

Counseling and other types of emotional support can boost success rates higher than medicines alone. There's also early evidence that combining certain medicines may work better than using a single drug.

Behavioral and supportive therapies may increase success rates even further. They also help the person stay smoke-free. Check the package insert of any product you are using to see if the manufacturer provides free telephone-based counseling.

Prepare for your Quit Day

Here are some steps to help you get ready for your Quit Day:

- Pick the date and mark it on your calendar.
- Tell friends and family about your Quit Day.
- Get rid of all the cigarettes and ashtrays in your home, car, and at work.
- Stock up on oral substitutes – sugarless gum, carrot sticks, hard candy, cinnamon sticks, coffee stirrers, straws, and/or toothpicks.
- Decide on a plan. Will you use NRT or other medicines? Will you attend a stop-smoking class? If so, sign up now.
- Practice saying, “No thank you, I don’t smoke.”
- Set up a support system. This could be a group program or a friend or family member who has successfully quit and is willing to help you.
- Ask family and friends who still smoke not to smoke around you, and not to leave cigarettes out where you can see them.
- If you are using bupropion or varenicline, take your dose each day leading up to your Quit Day.
- Think about your past attempts to quit. Try to figure out what worked and what didn't.

Successful quitting is a matter of planning and commitment, not luck. Decide now on your own plan.

On your Quit Day

Over time, smoking becomes a strong habit. Daily events, like waking up in the morning, finishing a meal, drinking coffee, or taking a break at work, often trigger your urge to smoke. Breaking the link between the trigger and smoking will help you stop.

On your Quit Day go down this list:

- Do not smoke. This means not at all – not even one puff!
- Stay busy – try walking, short bursts of exercise, or other activities and hobbies.
- Drink lots of water and juices.
- Start using nicotine replacement if that's your choice.
- Attend a stop-smoking class or follow your self-help plan.
- Avoid situations where the urge to smoke is strong.
- Avoid people who are smoking.
- Drink less alcohol or avoid it completely.
- Think about how you can change your routine. Use a different route to go to work. Drink tea instead of coffee. Eat breakfast in a different place or eat different foods.

Be prepared to feel the urge to smoke. It will pass whether you smoke or not. Use the 4 D's to help fight the urge:

- **Delay** for 10 minutes. Repeat if needed.
- **Deep breathe.** Close your eyes, slowly breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Picture your lungs filling with fresh, clean air.
- **Drink water** slowly, sip by sip.
- **Do something else.** Some activities trigger cravings. Get up and move around.

Often this simple trick will allow you to move beyond the strong urge to smoke.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/tobacco-and-cancer/health-risks-of-smoking-tobacco.html
2. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/benefits-of-quitting-smoking-over-time.html
3. <http://www.cancer.org/smokeout>
4. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/nicotine-replacement-therapy.html
5. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/prescription-drugs-to-help-you-quit-smoking.html
6. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/other-ways-to-quit-smoking.html
7. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/getting-help-with-the-mental-part-of-tobacco-addiction.html

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