

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Quitting Smoking and Weight Gain

Many people are afraid to quit smoking because they don't want to gain weight. Many smokers do gain some weight when they quit smoking—an average of five to seven pounds— and women gain slightly more weight than men. It is important to keep in mind that most smokers are about five to seven pounds underweight anyhow, so the weight a person gains when they quit smoking often simply returns them to their optimum weight. Another thing to keep in mind is that most people gain fewer than 10 pounds, even without making any changes to diet or regular exercise routines. If a person gains more than ten pounds while quitting smoking, other factors are typically to blame. The bottom line, however, is that the addition of a few pounds is worth the benefits you will gain from quitting.

If you are concerned about gaining weight when you quit smoking, evaluate which is more important to you–quitting the habit or quitting the habit without gaining weight. For some people, it important to focus on the goal of quitting, and worrying about gaining weight only makes the process more difficult. Others can make maintaining their weight or improving their overall fitness level a part of the process of quitting. It is up to you to decide which method will work for you.

Keep in mind that food will begin to taste better to you as your body starts to eliminate the effects of nicotine, making this a perfect time to reacquaint yourself with healthy food choices. Try fresh, raw vegetables when you get the urge to snack, and be sure to drink plenty of water to help flush the nicotine from your system. Also, choose low-fat or fat-free varieties of your favorite foods. Because nicotine acts as an appetite suppressant, you may find that you feel hungry more often once you quit smoking. Plan three nutritious meals and two or three nutritious snacks each day, but do not increase the number of calories you eat. Eat slowly so you can savor your food, leave the table as soon as you are finished, and brush your teeth right away so you won't be tempted to eat more. Maintaining calorie intake and eating small meals and light snacks throughout the day instead of three large meals can help you to maintain your weight.

As your endurance levels increase and light exercise becomes easier, beginning an exercise routine might be also good idea. Exercise can help to relieve stress and can serve as a substitute activity for smoking. It is a good idea to plan to include a minimum of 20–30 minutes of exercise into your daily schedule. As you are able to increase the intensity of your workout you will discover that exercise has important psychological benefits. Many of the psychological benefits you may feel you get from tobacco can also be obtained from exercise. Exercise can not only make you feel more energetic in general, but can also improve your quality of sleep and help you relax when under stress.

If you decide to begin an exercise routine, select activities you think you might enjoy and give them a try. Walking is a great activity to substitute for smoking. Instead of an after dinner smoke, take a walk. Another option is to take a yoga class and take note of positions you find most relaxing. When you feel stressed, spend a few minutes in one of your favorite positions instead of smoking or eating. Plan non-food and non-tobacco related rewards to keep you motivated to work toward you goal. Having an exercise plan and alternate activities to take the place of smoking can help you to maintain your weight.

Regardless of how you plan to deal with potential weight gain, keep in mind that the most important part of your goal is to actually stop smoking. If you find that it is too difficult to watch your weight and quit smoking at the same time, concentrate on giving up smoking first, and make a promise to yourself to start working on your weight as soon as you have successfully quit. Remember, the long-term benefits of quitting outweigh the short term effects of weight gain.

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Once you are aware of the advantages and disadvantages associated with quitting and have made the decision to quit, you are ready to move into the Preparation stage. During this stage, you will decide which approach to quitting is appropriate for you.

The awareness stage is where your motivation comes from. Understanding the benefits of quitting can give you the incentive you need to commit to a plan. In the preparation stage, it’s time to use your motivation to help you explore the techniques you can use to quit. It is especially important that you understand what your best options are.

The most effective way to stop smoking is to make the commitment to never light another cigarette again. Most successful smokers quit all at once, removing tobacco and tobacco- related items from their environments and making the commitment to avoid them from that day forward. However, because of the symptoms associated with nicotine withdrawal, many people find that it is easier to quit with the aid of either a nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), or a combination of NRT and prescription antidepressants.

If you don’t feel that quitting cold turkey is the right strategy, there are other methods you might be interested in. One popular option is a scheduled smoking reduction program, which can take several forms. If you are unwilling to give up tobacco "cold turkey", or all at once, you may feel more comfortable choosing this approach. The disadvantage to scheduled smoking reduction programs is that tobacco remains in your environment and becomes a constant temptation. If you choose to begin a smoking reduction program, you are working to eventually quit, rather than quitting all at once.

Regardless of which method you choose, you need to pay attention to both physiological and psychological aspects of smoking in order to be successful. A combination of behavioral interventions and nicotine replacement therapy has been shown to be the most effective because both physiological and psychological issues are addressed. In addition, a relapse prevention strategy is essential since most tobacco users relapse in the first 6–12 months after quitting.