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

Make Smoking a Thing of the Past

Quitting smoking is one of the healthiest steps we can take, though it is difficult. Statistics In November 2015, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention noted in their report, “In 2015, about 15 of every 100 U.S. adults aged 18 years or older (15.1%) had smoked cigarettes. This means an estimated 36.5 million adults in the United States currently smoke cigarettes."

Tighter restrictions on tobacco advertizing, higher taxes, age restrictions on tobacco purchase and legislation restricting smoking in public places have been some of the contributing factors. Most ex-smokers will tell you though, that it's the preservation of health that’s the biggest motivator. Quitting smoking is a major feat that can test strength, boost confidence and renew spirit. When you're ready to quit it's important to learn, plan and get support.

Cigarettes—Your Friend?

Most long-time smokers have come to see cigarettes as a friend. Smoking helps people cope in times of stress, serves as a reward for a job well done and helps pass the time when you’re bored.

But even if something has been a part of your life for years, it can be dangerous. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States. More than 480,000 deaths every year, or 1 of every 5 deaths each year result from tobacco-related causes.

It's never too late

Even if you've tried before and failed—it’s never too late to quit. In fact, the odds of permanent success go up with every attempt. No matter how long you've smoked, there are immediate benefits to quitting:

Within eight hours of stopping smoking	• Carbon monoxide levels drop in your body • Oxygen levels in your blood increase to normal
Within 48 hours	• The chances of having a heart attack start to decrease • Sense of smell and taste begin to improve
Within 72 hours	• Bronchial tubes relax, making breathing easier • Lung capacity increases
Within two weeks to three months	• Circulation improves • Lung functioning increases up to 30 per cent
Within six months	• Coughing, sinus congestion, tiredness and shortness of breath improve

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Within one year	• Risk of smoking-related heart attack is cut in half
Within 10 years	• Risk of dying from lung cancer is cut in half
Within 15 years	• Risk of dying from a heart attack is equal to a person who never smoked

Withdrawal from nicotine

The initial symptoms of quitting smoking can be very difficult. They may last a few days, a week or more.

You may feel light-headed at first, because instead of carbon monoxide, your blood is now carrying more oxygen to the brain. Other withdrawal symptoms may include:

- Increased coughing due to the lungs cleaning themselves of tar build-up
- Get extra rest, do a deep breathing exercises or use aspirin to relieve headaches
- Some people complain of constipation when they quit
- Tobacco irritates the throat but also numbs it, meaning discomfort may result as your throat returns to its natural state
- Exercise and deep breathing can alleviate a lack of concentration
- Nervousness, sadness and/or restlessness
- Tiredness can be combated with physical exercise or extra sleep
- Exercise and other relaxation techniques can also help with trouble sleeping
- Where once cigarettes were used for comfort, you may now be tempted to replace it with food, resulting in weight gain

If you encounter any of these symptoms, remember—they may be unpleasant, but they are temporary.

10 Rewards of quitting

Will you really benefit that much by quitting? Here are some benefits to remember:

- The chances of sustaining heart attack, lung cancer and over 20 other diseases will plummet
- Family and friends' risk of illness from second-hand smoke will drop
- Your children will be less likely to smoke, in fact, children of smokers are eight times more likely to take up the habit
- Your senses of smell and taste will return
- You'll look younger as your skin benefits from better circulation
- Women thinking of having children will be more apt to have a healthy child of normal birth weight
- Smoker's cough will end, and breathing will be easier
- Money—a regular smoker spends up to $1,000 a year on cigarettes
- You'll be less prone to accidents since smoking interferes with control of machinery and cars, not to mention it's a fire hazard
- Renewed self-confidence knowing you've just won a major victory

Quitting to win

The Heart and Stroke Foundation offers these tips:

- Ask yourself what it will take to stop smoking

- Think about reasons to quit every day
- Choose a quit date and work up to that date by reducing the number of cigarettes you smoke each day by 1 or 2
- Make a plan to deal with urges to smoke when they happen
- Let family/friends know what you are doing and ask for support
- Ask health care providers for information on smoking cessation programs
- Relapses are normal—learn from what happened and try again

Smoking is one of the most difficult of addictions to break. It's also one of the most destructive habits you can maintain. Break the cycle of addiction for yourself and those around you.