

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

A Breath of Fresh Air: Creating a Smoke-Free Reality

A nagging cough. Constant fatigue. Smelly clothes. Empty pockets. These are just a few reasons why most people want to quit smoking. More importantly, Tobacco-related illnesses kill thousands of people a year, a fact that also pushes a number of smokers to quit. But how do you get there when it seems impossible to do? After all, you may think cigarettes are your trusted friend, helping you stay calm, keeping your weight down and even helping you focus.

Stop! With the right resources and support, you can stop rationalizing and put together a plan for quitting and move towards a smoke-free vision of the future.

Excuse: I need to smoke in social situations.

Reality: Anti-smoking legislation in many countries has made lighting up in most workplaces, bars, restaurants, coffee shops and other meeting places a thing of the past. The truth is fewer people than ever are smoking, making it less of a social norm and easier for you to quit.

Avoid situations that make you want to smoke — like going for a drink or spending time with smoker buddies — during your first weeks after quitting.

Excuse: Smoking helps me cope with stress and relax.

Reality: You may feel more relaxed but smoking releases “feel-good chemicals” from the brain that only last about 30 minutes. When the feeling slips away, you’re left craving another one.

The bottom line? The nicotine in cigarettes is actually a stimulant and raises your blood pressure and your heart rate. You can release the same “feel-good” chemicals using other relaxation techniques like meditation, yoga or breathing exercises to cope with stress.

Excuse: If I quit smoking, I’ll gain weight.

Reality: When you quit smoking you may gain a little weight, as you’re likely to substitute cigarettes with food, but the health advantages of quitting are worth more than a few pounds. Think of butting out as your chance to start fresh and adopt a healthier physical routine. Not only will this help you quit—and stay smoke free—it will keep the pounds off, help improve heart and lung functions, relieve stress and cravings, and you’ll feel great about yourself.

Instead of turning to a cigarette go for a walk, pop in a workout DVD or take a boxing class.

Excuse: It’s impossible to quit.

Reality: Nicotine addiction is both physically and psychologically addictive, which can make it seem like it’s impossible to quit. Keep reminding yourself of all the good reasons you should quit, like the 4,000 dangerous chemicals — including arsenic, ammonia and cyanide — that you breathe in with each puff. Or the fact that one out of every two smokers will die from tobacco-related illness. Thousands of

smokers butt out each year with help from family and friends. ©
2026 Morneau Shepell Ltd.
Try going cold turkey, using nicotine replacement therapies, homeopathic options or talk to your doctor about the variety of choices available to help ease you into your smoke-free lifestyle. And remember: it takes many smokers more than one try to be successful so keep at it.

Excuse: Life won't be enjoyable without cigarettes.

Reality: Smoking stinks — literally and figuratively. It robs you of your hard-earned money, chips away at your health and your physical appearance (think yellow teeth and fingers and more wrinkles). Look at all the non-smokers you know. Do they have a good time? Are they happy in life? The first few times you attend a party, take a stroll or hang out with non-smoker friends. At first it may be difficult, but after that, it will be smooth sailing. Learning to ride a bike wasn't easy, but you toughed out the scrapes and falls. So challenge yourself once again and stick with your new and improved smoke-free life knowing the painful times will pass.

Excuse: The harm is already done.

Reality: It's never too late to quit and reap the health benefits: Within eight hours of quitting, carbon monoxide levels drop and oxygen levels in your blood return to normal. Within two days of butting out, your chance of heart attack decrease and, you'll be able to smell and taste better. Three days after your last cigarette, breathing gets easier and you'll have more lung capacity. Two weeks to three months after that, lung function increases by 30 per cent. Six months after quitting, coughing, sinus congestions, tiredness and shortness of breath improve. One year later? Your risk of heart attack is cut in half. After 10 years, your risk of dying from lung cancer is halved. Once you've been smoke-free for 15 years, your risk of a heart attack is the same as a person who never smoked.

There are more than enough reasons to quit smoking. The question is why do you smoke in the first place? Fear and force of habit make it hard to imagine a life without cigarettes and can make you doubt your ability to stop. Don't fall for the same old smoking myths and excuses; instead, step out of the haze and create your own new smoke-free reality.