

Tobacco Cessation

Ten Top Smoking Cessation Questions and Answers

1. What is the best way to quit smoking?

The best way to quit smoking is to combine a smoking cessation medication with a behavior modification program. Talk to your local pharmacist to get information about all the currently available smoking cessation medications. Contact your state tobacco cessation hotline, your local American Cancer Society or the American Lung Association to find out about behavior modification programs in your area.

2. Is there a cure to smoking?

Absolutely not. Smoking is not an illness that can be "cured". It is a behavior that one engages in. Therefore, only the individual can stop doing it. Smoking cessation medications simply reduce or eliminate withdrawal symptoms so that a quitter is comfortable enough to make the necessary changes in their behavior and thinking to ensure long-term success.

3. Are the smoking cessation medications safe?

The federal government and many major universities have extensively tested every product on the market. They are all totally safe and effective.

Why is smoking unsafe? Cigarettes contain over 4,000 chemicals that can do serious damage to your body. The FDA has approved a number of medications to assist in tobacco cessation. While no medication is without risk, these medications are generally safe and well-tolerated by most patients. Talk to your pharmacist or doctor about the specific benefits and risks of using each medication.

4. Do I have to quit on a certain day?

Yes! Cutting down or going to lower nicotine cigarette is not a good way to quit. Most people can only cut down so far before they start to go back up.

There is no perfect day to quit but some days may be better than others. Pick a day that has special significance to you or a date where your life is relatively calm so that you can devote your attention to quitting.

5. Do I need lots of willpower to quit smoking?

Believe it or not, willpower has nothing to do with successful quitting. For most people, willpower means gritting your teeth and making yourself quit. That simply doesn't work.

What's more effective is learning the skills to deal with the urges, desires and triggers to smoke. This is called coping.

So, quitting is more about "skill power" than willpower.

6. Do I have to change my entire life to learn to cope without cigarettes?

Absolutely not. Coping is not about hiding in your bedroom for three months, changing your entire life, or joining a convent!! Rather, successful coping is simply about two things: breaking the routines you associate with smoking and changing the way you think about cigarettes.

For example, if you used to smoke after a meal, get up from the table and take a short walk or brush your teeth instead of sitting there thinking about the cigarette that you miss. This is coping. There are hundreds of coping ideas throughout this program for all types of situations.

7. Why is nicotine addictive?

When you take nicotine in through your lungs it gets to your brain in about one or two minutes. This causes your brain to release chemicals that produce pleasure. The effect is fairly intense. You get a sort of "buzz" from the cigarette.

However, as soon as you finish a cigarette the nicotine level in your brain starts to drop. At some point you begin to experience withdrawal (e.g., irritability, anxiousness, restlessness, etc.) You don't like these feelings so you smoke another cigarette to get rid of them.

You do this over and over again throughout the day. In a sense, nicotine is doubly addictive. You smoke not only to get the positive "hit" or the "buzz" but also to prevent the negative withdrawal feelings. Your body eventually settles on an amount of nicotine it needs to feel okay and that's how much you smoke every day.

8. Are the smoking cessation products physically addictive?

No. With all the nicotine replacement products you receive a steady amount of nicotine throughout the day that is usually less than what you got when you smoked. Because this enters your body in a slow steady way, it keeps you out of withdrawal but also eliminates the

"hit". You don't get that pleasurable buzz that you get from smoking. There is no reinforcement when you use nicotine replacement so there is very little chance of physical addiction.

9. What are the most important things I should do if I want to quit?

- Set a quit day and stick to it.
- Identify problem situations. Where and when do you tend to smoke the most?
- Have a plan. Know how you are going to cope with these situations before they happen.
- Get a support person.
- Use a smoking cessation medication for the time recommended by the manufacturer.

10. Does smoking really get rid of stress?

No. Smoking actually causes stress. The chemicals in a cigarette make your heart beat faster and cause your blood pressure go up. Most people smoke 20 to 30 cigarettes a day and take about ten puffs on each cigarette. So, the average smoker makes their heart beat faster and causes their blood pressure to go up 200 to 300 times a day. This puts a tremendous amount of stress on the body.

There are two reasons some smokers feel more relaxed when they smoke:

- They are doing deep breathing, just like the breathing people learn in karate classes, during medication and for natural childbirth. Slow, deep breaths do calm and relax.
- Most people stop what they are doing when they smoke. They take a break, even if it is only a mental break. Smoking distracts them from the stressful situation.

Guess what? You can do deep breathing and take a break without a cigarette. These are safe, effective ways to deal with stress. You are only fooling yourself if you think smoking gets rid of all the stress in your life or helps you cope.

Content developed by the Pharmacy Partnership for Tobacco Cessation in conjunction with the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists.