

Quitting Tobacco: Handling Cravings ... Without Smoking

Nicotine and Your Body and Mind

- As a smoker, you are used to having a certain level of nicotine in your body. You control that level by how much you smoke, how deeply you inhale the smoke, and by the kind of tobacco you use. When you quit, cravings develop when the body wants more nicotine.
- When you are exposed to smoking triggers or even when you use a small amount of nicotine, your mood changes, and cravings for tobacco can go up as well as your heart rate and blood pressure. Cravings are NOT “just in your head.”

What To Expect

- Cravings usually begin within an hour or two after you stop smoking, peak for several days, and may last several weeks.
- The urge to smoke will come and go. Your cravings will be strongest in the first week after you quit using tobacco. Cravings usually last only a very brief period of time.
- You may also experience cravings that follow each other in rapid succession. As the days pass, the cravings will get farther apart. There is some evidence that mild occasional cravings may last for 6 months.

What To Do

- Remind yourself that cravings will pass.
- As a substitute for smoking, try chewing on carrots, pickles, sunflower seeds, apples, celery, or sugarless gum or hard candy. Keeping your mouth busy may stop the psychological need to smoke.
- Try this exercise: Take a deep breath through your nose and blow out slowly through your mouth. Repeat 10 times.
- Avoid situations and activities (like drinking alcohol) that you normally associate with smoking.

Related Notes

- Nicotine cravings may be reduced by using nicotine replacement products, which deliver small, steady doses of nicotine into the body. Nicotine replacement patches, gum, lozenges, nasal spray, and inhaler appear to be equally effective. Bupropion pills (which don't contain nicotine) also help relieve withdrawal symptoms.



How To Get Help

- If you or someone you know wants help with giving up tobacco, please call the National Cancer Institute's Smoking Quitline toll-free at 1-877-44U-QUIT (1-877-448-7848). The information specialists on the Quitline can provide suggestions and support to help smokers break the habit.
- The Federal Government's Smokefree.gov Web site (<http://www.smokefree.gov>) allows you to choose the help that best fits your needs. You can get immediate assistance:
 - View an online step-by-step cessation guide.
 - Find state quitline telephone numbers.
 - Instant message an expert through NCI's *LiveHelp* service.
 - Download, print, or order publications about quitting smoking.

This fact sheet was adapted from material developed by the Tobacco Education and Prevention Program of the Arizona Department of Health Services and the Arizona Smokers' Helpline of the University of Arizona.

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