

You Can Control Your Weight as You Quit Smoking

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

NIDDK | NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
DIABETES AND DIGESTIVE
AND KIDNEY DISEASES

WIN Weight-control Information Network

Congratulations on your decision to quit smoking! Quitting is one of the best actions you can take to improve your health. You may be concerned about gaining weight, but try not to worry about it as you quit. Focus on stopping smoking first, and then continue to improve your health in other ways, such as reaching and maintaining a healthy weight for life.

Will I gain weight if I stop smoking?

Not everyone gains weight when they stop smoking. Among people who do, the average weight gain is less than 10 pounds. Roughly 10 percent of people who stop smoking gain a large amount of weight—as many as 30 pounds.

What causes weight gain after quitting?

When smokers quit, they may gain weight for a number of reasons. These include:

- **Feeling hungry.** Quitting smoking may make a person feel hungrier and eat more than usual, but this feeling usually goes away after several weeks.
- **Having more snacks and alcoholic drinks.** Some people eat more high-fat, high-sugar snacks and drink more alcoholic beverages after they quit smoking.
- **Burning calories at a normal rate again.** Every cigarette you smoke makes your body burn calories faster, but is also harmful to your heart. Once you quit, you are no longer getting this temporary effect. Instead, you are burning slightly fewer calories on a daily basis.

Do you want to quit smoking?
Are you worried about gaining weight? If so, this information may help you.

If you gain a few pounds when you quit, do not dwell on it. Instead, feel proud that you are improving your health.

Can I avoid weight gain?

Physical activity and a healthy eating plan may help you control your weight. In addition, being physically active may ease withdrawal symptoms during smoking cessation and help reduce the chances of relapsing after quitting.

While it is a good idea to be physically active and eat healthy foods as you quit smoking, try not to worry about your weight. It may be easier to quit first and focus on controlling your weight when you are smoke-free.

To lower your chances of gaining weight when you stop smoking:

- Accept yourself.
- Get regular, moderate-intensity physical activity.
- Limit snacking and alcohol.
- Consider using medication to help you quit.
- Consider getting professional advice about weight control.

Accept yourself.

If you gain a few pounds when you quit, do not dwell on it. Instead, feel proud that you are improving your health. Quitting smoking may make you feel better in many ways.

Quitting smoking may help you have:

- more energy
- whiter teeth
- fresher breath and fresher smelling clothes and hair
- fewer wrinkles and healthier-looking skin
- a clearer voice

Get regular, moderate-intensity physical activity.

Regular physical activity may help you avoid large weight gains when you quit smoking. It may also boost your mood and help you feel more energetic. It is likely that you will be able to breathe easier during physical activity after you quit smoking.

Aim to be physically active at a moderate-intensity level (one that makes you breathe harder but does not overwork or overheat you) on most, if not all, days of the week. You can accomplish this by breaking it up into shorter sessions—it does not need to be done all at once. After you quit smoking and are ready to lose weight, you may need to increase the amount of time that you are physically active each day or increase your intensity level to achieve your weight-loss goals. The ideas below may help you to be active.

Ideas for Being Active Every Day

- Use your lunch break to walk around and stretch, or take a walk after dinner.
- Sign up for a class such as dance or yoga. Ask a friend to join you.
- Get off the bus one stop early if you are in an area safe for walking.
- Park the car farther away from entrances to stores, movie theaters, or your home.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Make sure the stairs are well lit.

Limit snacking and alcohol.

Having more high-fat, high-sugar snacks and alcoholic drinks may lead to weight gain when you quit smoking. The ideas on the next page may help you make healthy eating and beverage choices as you quit smoking.

Regular physical activity may help you avoid large weight gains when you quit smoking.

Choose healthy snacks, such as fresh fruit or canned fruit packed in its own juices, low-fat air-popped popcorn, or low-fat yogurt when you are hungry between meals.

Tips for Healthy Eating and Beverage Selections as You Quit

- Do not go too long without eating. Being very hungry may lead to less healthy food choices.
- Eat enough at meals to satisfy you, but try not to overeat. Eat slowly so you can pick up on your body's signals that you are full.
- Choose healthy snacks, such as fresh fruit or canned fruit packed in its own juices, low-fat air-popped popcorn, or low-fat yogurt when you are hungry between meals.
- Do not deny yourself an occasional treat. If you crave ice cream, enjoy a small serving, which is 1/2 cup.
- Choose an herbal tea, hot cocoa made with fat-free milk, or sparkling water instead of an alcoholic beverage.

Consider using medication to help you quit.

Talk to your health care provider about medications that may help you quit smoking. Some people gain less weight when they use medication.

Medications That May Help You Quit Smoking

- Nicotine replacement therapy, including the patch, gum, lozenges, nasal spray, and inhaler.
- Antidepressant medication.

The patch, lozenges, and gum are available without a prescription from your health care provider.

Consider getting professional advice about weight control.

You may find it easier to control your weight with the help of a health professional. Ask your health care provider if there is a weight-management program in your area. Also, consider speaking with a registered dietitian, nutritionist, personal trainer, or exercise professional about becoming physically active and adopting a healthy eating plan. You may need to contact your health insurer to make sure weight-management services are covered by your plan.

Will weight gain hurt my health?

Although gaining weight is not desired after you stop smoking, keep in mind that the overall health benefits of quitting outweigh the health risks of weight gain.

Health Risks of Smoking

- **Cancer.** Smoking greatly increases the risk for lung cancer, the leading cause of cancer death in the United States. Smoking is also linked to cancer of the esophagus, larynx, kidney, pancreas, and cervix.
- **Other health problems.** Smoking increases the risk for lung disease and heart disease. In pregnant women, smoking is linked to premature birth, babies with low birth weight, and delivery complications.

By quitting smoking, you are taking a big step to improve your health. Instead of worrying about weight gain, focus on quitting. Once you are tobacco-free, you can work toward having a healthy weight for life by becoming more physically active and choosing healthier foods.

Additional Reading From the Weight-control Information Network

Active at Any Size. National Institutes of Health (NIH) Publication No. 10–4352.
<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/active.htm>

Better Health and You. NIH Publication No. 08–4992 (available in English and Spanish).
http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/better_health.htm

Changing Your Habits: Steps to Better Health. NIH Publication No. 08–6444.
<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/changing-habits.htm>

Energize Yourself and Your Family. NIH Publication No. 08–4926.
<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/energize.htm>

By quitting smoking, you are taking a big step to improve your health. Instead of worrying about weight gain, focus on quitting.

Just Enough for You: About Food Portions. NIH Publication No. 09–5287.
http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/just_enough.htm

Walking...A Step in the Right Direction. NIH Publication No. 07–4155.
<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/walking.htm>

Additional Resources

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

AHCPR Supported Clinical Practice Guidelines, 18. *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update.* Available online at
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/bookshelf/br.fcgi?book=hsahcpr&part=A28163>.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. October 2008. Available online at
<http://www.health.gov/PAGuidelines>.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

ChooseMyPlate. More information and interactive tools on healthy eating and physical activity are available at <http://www.choosemyplate.gov>.

For more information on quitting smoking, contact:

American Cancer Society

Phone: 1–800–ACS–2345
(800–227–2345)
<http://www.cancer.org>

American Heart Association

Phone: 1–800–AHA–USA1
(800–242–8721)
<http://www.americanheart.org>

American Lung Association

Phone: 1–800–LUNGUSA
(800–586–4872)
<http://www.lungusa.org>

National Cancer Institute

Phone: 1–800–4–CANCER
(800–422–6237)
<http://www.nci.nih.gov>

National Institute on Drug Abuse

Phone: (301) 443-1124

<http://www.nida.nih.gov>

Office of the Surgeon General

Phone: (301) 443-4000

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco>

Smokefree.gov

(a partnership of the American Cancer Society, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Cancer Institute)

Phone: 1-877-44U-QUIT (877-448-7848)

Phone for help within your State:

1-800-QUITNOW (800-784-8669)

<http://www.smokefree.gov>

Weight-control Information Network

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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government's lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity. Authorized by Congress (Public Law 103-43), WIN provides the general public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with up-to-date, science-based health information on weight control, obesity, physical activity, and related nutritional issues.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This fact sheet was also reviewed by Robert Eckel, M.D., Professor of Medicine, Physiology, and Biophysics, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

This fact sheet is also available at
<http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov>.

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