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# The Harms of Smoking and Ways to Quit

Smoking increases your risk of developing more than 50 serious health conditions. In this article, we will not cover all of them, but we will focus on the most common and most smoking-related health issues in detail, along with ways to quit.

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## Does Smoking Cause Addiction?

Smoking causes addiction in a very short time because it contains nicotine, which is responsible for addiction to tobacco products in general, including cigarettes.

The amount of nicotine that enters the body depends on how a person smokes and varies from one person to another, as well as depending on the nicotine concentration in the product used.

Nicotine is absorbed through the mouth, enters the bloodstream, and reaches the lungs and brain within seconds. The more you smoke, the more nicotine your body absorbs.

Cigarettes contain about 600 components, many of which are also found in cigars and hookah. When burned, these components produce more than 7,000 chemical compounds, including at least 69 toxic substances linked to cancer.

There is no safe way to smoke. Introducing tobacco into the body harms health in the long term, and it takes time for its side effects to disappear after quitting. Replacing cigarettes with other products such as cigars, pipes, or hookah will not help you avoid the harms of smoking. Modern products like vapes also contain tobacco or harmful chemicals, and sufficient research has not yet been conducted on them.

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## The Health Effects of Smoking

Smoking has many long-term harmful effects, including cancer. Smoking causes about 70% of lung cancer cases, in addition to cancers in other parts of the body, including:

- Stomach
- Liver
- Pancreas
- Kidneys
- Bladder
- Intestines

- Pelvis
- Throat
- Esophagus
- Larynx
- Mouth

Lung-related conditions include:

- Pneumonia
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), including emphysema and chronic bronchitis

Smoking also worsens other respiratory conditions such as respiratory infections, asthma, and the common cold.

Other health conditions caused by smoking include:

- Blood vessel diseases
- Stroke
- Coronary heart disease
- Heart attacks

Additionally, smoking reduces fertility in both men and women.

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## **The Harms of Secondhand Smoke**

If you do not smoke but are exposed to secondhand smoke from a family member, your risk of developing lung cancer increases by 25%.

Secondhand smoke is the smoke released from the burning end of a cigarette as well as the smoke exhaled by the smoker. It exposes non-smokers to many of the same health risks faced by smokers. The more exposure over time, the greater the risk.

Children and infants are the most affected. A child exposed to secondhand smoke has an increased risk of infections, meningitis, and chronic cough. If the child has asthma, symptoms may worsen over time.

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## **Ways to Quit Smoking**

Making the decision is the first step toward quitting. Get rid of the cigarettes you have, either immediately or gradually, depending on what suits you, and create a plan to quit.

If you feel the urge to smoke, wait 10 minutes before taking any action. Distract yourself with an activity to keep your mind occupied. For example, go somewhere smoking is not allowed.

Write down or say out loud the reasons that made you want to quit. Add the benefits of quitting, such as better health, protecting loved ones from secondhand smoke, and saving money.

Remember, actively resisting the urge to smoke works better than doing nothing. Every time you overcome the urge, you move one step closer to quitting for good.

Steps that can help in your quitting journey include:

- Trying nicotine replacement therapy under medical supervision
- Using gum or hard candy to resist cravings
- Avoiding smoking triggers (situations, places, or even people)
- Avoiding the thought, “I’ll just have one cigarette,” as it often leads back to addiction
- Practicing meditation to reduce stress
- Starting exercise, even if only 10 minutes a day
- Asking for help, especially from close friends and family

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## **Reducing the Harms of Smoking Over Time (Benefits of Quitting)**

Nicotine is addictive, so when you stop using it, you may experience withdrawal symptoms. These vary from person to person but usually include cravings, irritability, stress, and increased appetite. These symptoms gradually disappear as nicotine leaves the body and the body adjusts to functioning without it.

Although quitting is not easy, the benefits are worth it. Quitting reduces your risk of many diseases and health problems, including:

- Better oral health and stain-free teeth
- Clearer skin
- Stronger immune system
- More stable hormones

Here is what happens to your body over time after quitting:

- Within 12 hours: Carbon monoxide levels return to normal, and heart rate returns to normal.
- Within 1 year: Blood pressure improves, the risk of heart attack decreases, and coughing and respiratory problems gradually improve.
- Within 2–5 years: Stroke risk becomes similar to that of a non-smoker.
- Within 5–15 years: Risk of throat, mouth, and pharyngeal cancers decreases by 50%.

- Within 10 years: Risk of lung and bladder cancer becomes 50% lower compared to smokers.
- Within 15 years: Risk of heart disease becomes similar to someone who has never smoked.

You can seek help from a healthcare professional to take the first step toward quitting and to choose a long-term plan that suits you.

Wishing you continued good health.