

Kicking the Habit

If you smoke, kicking the habit can be among your toughest challenges. Smoking is a powerful addiction that can create both physical and psychological dependence.

However, more than 3 million Americans stop smoking every year, according to the American Lung Association. With the right tools, motivation and support, you too can quit for good.

Deciding to quit can be the most difficult part of breaking the habit. But once you quit, the rewards begin almost immediately. Within just 12 hours, your heart and lungs start to repair the damage caused by nicotine and tobacco. After a few days, your sense of smell and taste slowly improve.

Staying committed and motivated also influence your chances of kicking the habit. Smokers who survive a heart attack are most likely to quit forever because they're extremely motivated to remain healthy.

Your health care provider can suggest ways to help you quit. The American Lung Association recommends these effective strategies:

- Develop a "quitting plan." Decide on a day to quit and stick with that date. Reward yourself when you reach certain milestones; after your first smoke-free week, try out a new hobby.
- Pick a good time to quit. Don't try to quit when you're under a lot of stress or around the holidays.
- Join a stop-smoking program such as Freedom From Smoking, sponsored by the American Lung Association. The program provides many ideas on how to quit successfully. Check your local hospital or community center for program availability.
- Exercise every day to improve your mood and help stay fit. Walking is a great way to reduce the stress of quitting.
- Ask family, friends and coworkers for support. Their encouragement can provide much-needed motivation on a rough day.
- Consider trying nicotine-replacement therapy, Nicotine gum, patches, inhalers and nasal sprays help by easing the nicotine addiction so you can break your habit over time.

Most smokers need to "practice" quitting several times before making it for good. The best guidance is to keep trying because practice helps smokers learn what to do the next time they have the urge to light up.

Be aware that you may feel sleepy, anxious, lightheaded or irritable when you first stop smoking. You may also crave tobacco, sweets or experience frequent headaches. The American Lung Association (1-800-LUNG-USA) can help you quit by providing information on support groups and other helpful resources.