



Australian Government

**GIVE UP  
FOR GOOD**



# Smoking and quitting FAQs

It's no secret that smoking reduces quality of life and increases risk of disease – including cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes – and that smoking also has negative effects on your mood, how you look, and your wallet.

The nicotine in tobacco products is highly addictive, which is why quitting can be hard and may take several attempts. But no matter how long you've been smoking, it's never too late to quit, and there are lots of free support services and tools to help you do it.

Quitting at any age will improve your health and quality of life, and protect the health of people around you.

This document answers a range of common questions about why you should stop smoking and how it will improve your health.

Arming yourself with the facts is the first step to giving up smoking for good.

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## What happens in your body when you smoke a cigarette?

Within 10 seconds of the first puff, toxic chemicals in tobacco smoke enter your lungs, move into your blood stream and spread through your body. These chemicals cause damage anywhere they go.

Cigarette smoke contains over 100 toxic chemicals and at least 70 of these are known causes of cancer.

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## How does smoking damage your body?

Toxic chemicals in cigarette smoke damage your body in many ways, for example:

**Nicotine** narrows your veins and arteries.

This can damage your heart by forcing it to work harder to pump your blood around your body. It can also reduce the blood flow in your feet and hands.

**Carbon monoxide** deprives your heart of the oxygen it needs to pump blood around your body. Over time, your airways swell up and let less air into your lungs.

**Tar** is a sticky substance that coats the inside of your lungs.



**Phenols** paralyse and kill the hair-like cells in your airways. The damaged cells can no longer keep the lining of your airways clean and protect you against infections.

**Ammonia** and **formaldehyde** irritate your eyes, nose and throat.

**Cancer-causing chemicals** make your cells grow too fast or abnormally – which can encourage the growth of dangerous cancer cells. Smoking is known to cause at least 16 types of cancer.

**Chemicals** in tobacco smoke can make it more difficult to fall pregnant and affect sperm quality. Smoking during pregnancy can affect an unborn baby's development and may have lifelong effects.

## Can smoking change how you look?

Yes, smoking tobacco can have a negative effect on how you look. It can:

cause yellow-brown stains on your fingers, tongue and teeth

increase your risk of tooth loss, damaged gums and bad breath

make your skin saggy and give you early wrinkles

make your hair lose its natural shine.

## Can smoking negatively affect mental health?

Yes. There is growing evidence to suggest that smoking has a negative impact on mental health.

Some studies show that smoking is associated with increased rates of anxiety, panic attacks, depression, suicide attempts, and schizophrenia.

Withdrawal symptoms for a person dependent on nicotine can include irritability, anxiety and restlessness.

If smoking is impacting your mental wellbeing, help is available. You can talk to your GP or a health professional or try one of these organisations.

13YARN [www.13yarn.org.au](http://www.13yarn.org.au) or phone 13 9276

Beyond Blue [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or phone **1300 224 636**

Head to Health [www.headtohealth.gov.au](http://www.headtohealth.gov.au) or phone **1800 595 212**

Headspace [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au) or phone **1800 650 890**

## Is my health still harmed if I only smoke sometimes?

Yes. There is no safe level, or method, of smoking. Even an occasional cigarette is harmful. The only way to reduce harm is to not smoke.

## Can my smoking harm others around me?

Yes. It's not just the health of the person who smokes that is harmed. Second-hand smoke contains the same toxic and cancer-causing chemicals, and is a serious health risk to everyone, especially babies, children, and pregnant women.



The harmful chemicals in tobacco smoke can stay in the air for hours, even if you ventilate or filter the air. If you smoke inside, these harmful chemicals can also cover walls, furniture, clothes, toys and other objects, and are difficult to remove by cleaning and can remain for months or even years.

## What happens to your body if you quit smoking?

You will feel the benefits of quitting almost straight away as your body starts to repair the damage. Depending on how much you smoked, you should start seeing benefits in a week.

The health benefits include decreased blood pressure, improved smell and taste, improved lung function, and a decrease in coughing and shortness of breath. The risk of heart disease drops by half within a year of quitting.

Quitting can also benefit your family and friends. You will protect them from harmful second-hand smoke.

## How can I quit smoking?

There are lots of ways to give up smoking for good. Often, a combination of methods is most successful. Some of the ways you can quit are:

Getting advice from your doctor or health professional.

Contacting the Quitline – call **13 7848** between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday to talk to a counsellor or ask for a call back.

Visiting [Quit.org.au](http://Quit.org.au) – a website with information on quitting methods and how you may feel during the quitting process.

Using digital tools, such as [My QuitBuddy](#) – a free mobile phone app designed to support and encourage you to quit smoking. It lets you set personal goals, track your progress and see how much money you've saved.

Using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) such as patches, gums, and sprays to reduce the cravings and withdrawal symptoms when you stop smoking. When used properly, NRT can make a big difference in helping you quit successfully.

Gradually cutting down – slowly reducing the number of cigarettes you smoke until you've quit completely. The key is that you work towards quitting completely as there are still health risks with even light smoking.

Going 'cold turkey' – relying on your own willpower to get you through the cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

## What if I tried to quit in the past, but it didn't work?

Quitting might take several attempts, and you can learn something every time you try. Every quit attempt will bring you one step closer to giving up for good.

It's always worth trying again, and you can try a different approach. Talking to a health professional can help you make a quit plan and understand the options available that could work for you.

Quitting can be hard, but many people have quit and you can too.

For help to give up smoking for good, talk to a health professional, visit [Quit.org.au](http://Quit.org.au), call Quitline on **13 7848**, or download the [My QuitBuddy](#) app.



For more information visit

[health.gov.au/GiveUpForGood](http://health.gov.au/GiveUpForGood)

**Quitline**  
**137848**