



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 effective tools to help you.

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.

## 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.

## 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 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.

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## 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.

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## 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 22 4636**

Medicare Mental Health [www.medicarementalhealth.gov.au](http://www.medicarementalhealth.gov.au) or phone **1800 595 212**

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

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## 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.

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## 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, are difficult to remove by cleaning and can remain for months or even years.



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## 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.

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## How can I quit smoking?

There are different ways to give up smoking for good and lots of support to help you if you need it. Often, using a few of these together works best.

Some of the ways you can quit are:

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' – stopping smoking straight away and relying on your own willpower to get you through the cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

Using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) such as patches, gums and sprays to reduce the cravings and withdrawal symptoms when you stop smoking. NRT can make a big difference in helping you quit successfully, especially if used alongside behavioural support (such as advice from a Quitline counsellor or health professional).

While quitting, you may find it helpful to:

Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or health professional for advice about the different options available to you, including medications.

Call the Quitline on **13 7848** for confidential advice and support from professional counsellors. You can even request a free callback for a time that works for you.

Visit [Quit.org.au](http://Quit.org.au) for tips and strategies to help you quit and information on what to expect during the quitting process.

Download the **My QuitBuddy** app – it's free and helps you set your own personal goals, track your progress and see how much money you've saved. There is also a range of distractions to help you resist any cravings as you quit.

Share your quit story with a family member or friend you trust to give you support.

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## What products are available to help you quit smoking?

There is a range of safe and effective products available to help you quit smoking. They include NRT (which includes nicotine patches, gum and mouth sprays) and other prescribed stop smoking medications. These products have passed strict safety standards and are proven to help people reduce cravings and ease feelings of withdrawal. Many NRT products are available at your local supermarket or over the counter at the chemist, some are even subsidised through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, making them cheaper.

Your doctor, pharmacist or other trusted health professional can provide advice and help you find the option that works for you.

For many people using a combination of supports is most effective, such as using NRT and speaking with a Quitline counsellor or health professional for general advice and support.



## What about using vapes to quit smoking?

Therapeutic vapes, which are only available at participating pharmacies and under the guidance of a health professional, should only be considered if you have been unable to quit smoking using other treatment options – like NRT.

Therapeutic vapes are different to those sold illegally by other retailers or online as they are required to meet product standards to reduce certain risks associated with the use of vapes. However, there is no guarantee about their safety, quality or performance.

Using vapes without clinical guidance is not recommended as they can be harmful to your health and may not be an effective way for you to quit.

If you are using vapes to quit smoking, you should have a follow-on plan to eventually quit smoking and vaping entirely – and become nicotine-free.

Your doctor, pharmacist or other trusted health professional can provide advice, including help to manage nicotine dependence while you quit.

## Can other nicotine products, like pouches, help you quit smoking?

There is no strong research that supports the use of other nicotine products, such as pouches, to help people quit smoking or vaping. There is evidence that these products may be harmful to your health and will keep you hooked on nicotine.

These products are different to NRT and have not been tested or approved for use in Australia.

## 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](https://www.quit.org.au), call Quitline on **13 7848**, or download the [My QuitBuddy](#) app.



For more information visit

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

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