

Dealing with Withdrawal & Other Concerns

Withdrawal from nicotine is comprised of two parts: the physical and the psychological. The physical symptoms, although annoying, are NOT life threatening. Nicotine replacement therapy can reduce these symptoms. The psychological part of quitting is often the greater challenge. If you have been a smoker for any extended period of time, it has become linked to everything that you do - from waking up in the morning, to eating, to watching TV, to socializing, everything. Naturally, it will take time to "un-link" smoking from your daily life, which is why during the quit process, the cravings and urges to smoke arise frequently.

Most people who are trying to stop smoking have some withdrawal symptoms, but usually not all of those that are listed below. Use this information to help you with the symptoms you have. Do not worry about those that you do not experience. If any of these symptoms become too hard to bear, contact your primary care provider for further assessment.

IRRITABILITY / ANXIETY

- The body's craving for nicotine causes irritability after stopping smoking.
- Irritability from stopping smoking will lessen over time, typically over a span of two to four weeks.
- Using different forms of nicotine replacement therapy should help to ease these symptoms.
- Inform your family and friends that this is going to be a tough time for you and remind them that these symptoms, although frustrating, are temporary, and are a result of you trying to do something great for yourself.

CRAVING A CIGARETTE

- Cravings for cigarettes happen most often during the first few days of the smoke-free process. These cravings are short-lived, so just bear with them and the time can pass.
- Cravings lessen over time. Most ex-smokers say that they only have an occasional urge to smoke about two to three weeks after they have quit.
- Distract yourself. Walks, talking with friends and loved ones, picking up a new hobby, reading a book, or exercising are all examples of doing something more constructive with your time.

COUGHING / CLEARING YOUR THROAT / DRY THROAT / POST-NASAL DRIP

- A smoker's body created extra mucous to help rid the body naturally of the harmful chemicals in cigarettes. Once smoking is stopped, the body no longer produces this extra mucous. Coughing and clearing of the throat are natural reactions to this adjustment.
- Coughing and other similar symptoms are simply signs of the body healing itself.
- These symptoms usually go away within a few days after you stop smoking.
- Drinking water or having a hard candy are ways to ease the coughing.

SLEEPLESS NIGHTS (INSOMNIA)

- Nicotine can affect how deeply you sleep. Once you stop smoking, your body no longer has its "fix" of nicotine. This symptom should go away within a few days. Note: Dreaming about smoking is also a very common occurrence.
- Ways in which you can battle the insomnia in a calm manner include deep breathing, a hot bath before going to bed, and drinking decaffeinated tea or warm milk.

LIGHTHEADED (DIZZINESS)

- Dizziness seems to happen because the body is now getting normal amounts of oxygen that it otherwise did not get when you smoked. This is a sign of your body repairing yourself and returning back to normal health.
- This is a very common symptom and should only last a few days.

CONCENTRATION PROBLEMS

- Smokers rely on nicotine to help them concentrate. Most ex-smokers say that their concentration returns to normal within one or two weeks after stopping smoking.
- Choosing a weekend or vacation are often good times to plan on stopping smoking.

FEELING TIRED

- Nicotine is a stimulant, which means that your body speeds up. Feeling tired is the body's reaction to not having the nicotine. Energy levels will increase as the body gets more used to the effects of not smoking.
- Tiredness typically happens in the afternoon. Try to plan activities that help keep energy levels running high, like a mid-afternoon workout with a friend.
- Healthy eating habits and avoiding foods high in sugar can help reduce the effects of feeling tired.
- Use of the nicotine patch or gum can help lessen this problem.

HUNGER

- Sometimes, cigarette cravings are mistaken for hunger.
- Try not to replace cigarettes with food.
- Use the "5 D's" :
 - **Delay**
Drink water
 - **Do something else**
Deep breathe
 - **Discuss with a friend**

DEPRESSION

- Some ex-smokers say that stopping smoking is like losing a friend. It is not uncommon to feel a bit depressed during the quit process.
- Remind yourself that stopping smoking will have amazing long-term positive effects and that the negative feelings and withdrawal will pass in a short period of time.
- Physical activity often reduces the negative feelings.
- These feelings WILL PASS. Remind yourself over and over again that the progress you have made so far is something to be tremendously proud of. Starting to smoke again often increases the depressing due to the guilt of having returned to smoking.

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- Discuss your feelings with others.
- Using oral medications (Zyban®) as antidepressants will assist you in maintaining a positive outlook on the whole process. If you have severe symptoms of depression, speaking with your primary care provider about being prescribed to this medication immediately.

CONSTIPATION

- Constipation may occur for a brief period after stopping smoking. It will typically go away within a week or two.
- Eat more whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Physical activity will help to reduce constipation.

CHEST TIGHTNESS

- Your body craving nicotine often causes tightness in the chest.
- This usually passes within a few days of having stopped smoking.
- Speak with your primary care provider if you are concerned.

SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT

Call 275-2662 to schedule an appointment at the University Health Service (UHS). UHS offers a full range of services. All visits to UHS are confidential.

RELATED HEALTH LINKS

American Cancer Society: General information about cancer with statistical data. Can be useful for families, health care professionals, and cancer survivors. www.cancer.org

American Heart Association: Comprehensive information on heart related diseases and activities of the AHA. www.americanheart.org

American Lung Association: Focuses on asthma, tobacco control, and environmental health. Offers the Freedom From Smoking written guide, audiocassette program, and other information on local group clinics and online programs. www.lungusa.org

National Institutes of Health: A broad source of medical information. www.nih.gov

New York State Department of Health: New York State Department of Health Website with a direct link to the New York State Smokers' Quitsite. www.health.state.ny.us