My story is that I started smoking in college to help deal with stress. Everyone in my family smoked, and I quickly became addicted too. I lost track of how many times and ways I tried quitting over the years. In truth, it was harder for me to quit smoking than it was to lose my leg and learn to walk again. As Mark Twain is thought to have said, “Quitting smoking is easy. I’ve done it hundreds of times.”

But I finally did quit and have not smoked at all for seven years! Even though I no longer smoke, I still know how hard it is to quit. This article includes facts about ways to quit – many of which I tried.
Your work is to figure out which way or ways work best for you. No matter which you choose, I know you can quit!

**The dangers of smoking**

Smoking is the most preventable cause of death and disease in the U.S. today. Studies show that tobacco is a factor in one-third of all deaths from cancer. These include lung, mouth, larynx, bladder, kidney, cervix, esophagus, stomach and pancreas cancer. Here are some other health problems from smoking:

- Peripheral vascular disease which, in turn, can lead to amputation
- Heart and lung problems such as strokes, heart attacks and emphysema
- Decreased mobility and stamina
- Weakened bones, immune systems, and the body’s ability to heal
- Increased risk for Type 2 diabetes. People with diabetes who smoke are at risk for nerve damage, vision loss and amputation.

**OK, I know all this. I’ve tried quitting before and failed. Please don’t nag!**
Few people can quit smoking “cold turkey” without having withdrawal symptoms or cravings. The average smoker tries to quit seven times before quitting for good. Here are some reasons it is hard to quit:

- Nicotine is one of the most addictive substances in nature. It is even more addictive than alcohol, heroin or cocaine.
- Symptoms of withdrawal can be hard. They include physical symptoms (such as trouble sleeping or concentrating) and psychological ones (such as being nervous, angry or short-tempered).
- It is hard to break habits that have been part of your life each day for many years.

After your first cigarette, smoking is not a lifestyle choice. People often find it easier to quit once they accept that it is an addiction. Willpower has little to do with quitting. The old saying is true, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” There are many proven ways to help people stop smoking. These include cutting down, hypnosis, acupressure, counseling, support groups, cold turkey, inpatient treatment programs, aversion therapy (such as the snap of a rubber band or a mild
electrical shock), behavior modification, and lifestyle changes. There are also many medications – some need a prescription, others do not. Most people use two or more ways to quit.

**OK, I’m ready to try quitting. How do I get started?**

Here are 5 steps you can follow. These are based on information from the office of the U.S. Surgeon General.

**Step 1. Get Ready**

You need to be ready to quit. For many people, this means knowing your motivation or reasons. A good way to begin is by asking yourself, “Why do I want to quit?” Make a list of your answers and keep a copy nearby. This can be very helpful when you need to remember why quitting matters to you. Maybe these are some of your reasons:

- Setting a good example for your children
• Seeing your children (or grandchildren) grow up
• Getting rid of the odor in your clothes, house and car
• Walking without pain and not getting short of breath
• Not risking more limb loss because of smoking

My reason to quit was that osteoporosis weakened my bones and interfered with my ability to wear a prosthesis. This affected my level of mobility and activity. So my choice was simple – I could either walk or smoke. Duh!

Beyond knowing why to quit, you also need to make a plan. You can start by:

• Finding needed help. Local hospitals often offer free smoking cessation programs. Many county and state health departments provide free information about quitting. You can also call 800/QUIT-NOW (800/784-8669) and speak with a trained counselor who can tell you about free smoking cessation programs in your state.
• Thinking about what did and did not work when you tried quitting before. This time, make a plan to deal with these problems.
• Checking with your insurance provider to see what programs and medications are covered (they will pay for) under your health plan.

Step 2. Get Support

Ask your family and friends for their help and support. Let them know about your plans to quit and ask for their encouragement. Here are some ideas to use:

• Make sure your husband, wife or significant other knows this is NOT a reason to nag! That will only make this stressful time worse. And since stress may be a trigger for you to smoke, nagging can make quitting even harder.

• Talk to people who used to smoke and find out how they quit. Ask ex-smokers to check in with you each day to see how it’s going. You might also want to quit with a buddy and support each other through the process.

• Ask your co-workers to understand if you are cranky, short-tempered, or have mood swings as you are quitting. If your co-workers smoke, ask them not to light up around you or excuse yourself briefly while they smoke.
• Join a support group. If you cannot get to meetings or don’t like groups, you can get support by phone or the Internet. This includes online chat rooms and other Internet support.

**Step 3. Learn New Skills and Behaviors**

Figure out your smoking triggers – these are times or places when you almost always smoke. Common triggers are stress (tension), coffee, alcohol and food. Before you try to quit, plan ways to deal with these triggers. For instance:

• Find ways to change from your smoking routine to more healthful habits. Don’t worry, the phone will still work and your car will start without a cigarette in your mouth. Keep a supply of healthful snacks or sugar-free gum or mints nearby.

• Shake up your daily routine or change your diet. If coffee is one of your triggers, switch to tea or fruit juice. Go for a walk after lunch, and be active each day. Do not drink alcohol. Instead, drink lots of water to help flush nicotine from your body.
• Avoid stress or learn new ways to deal with it. You might practice deep breathing or other ways to release tension such as reading a book, soaking in the tub, or going for a walk.

Step 4. Get Medication and Use It

Talk to your doctor about approved medications known to help people quit. Studies show that these medications double your chance of quitting if used alone. They can work even better when used along with other ways of quitting. Medications include:

• Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT). This provides nicotine in a safe form to ease withdrawal. You can buy gum, patches and lozenges without a prescription. You need a prescription for inhalers and nasal sprays.

• Bupropion. This is an antidepressant that is also approved as an antismoking drug because it helps suppress cravings and withdrawal. It is available by prescription and sold either as Zyban or Wellbutrin IR, SR or XL. This medication can be used alone or with NRT.
• Clonidine (Catapres). This is an antihypertensive drug. Talk with your doctor if you have high blood pressure as this drug has been shown to help reduce cravings.

• Varenicline (Chantix). This is the latest nicotine-free drug approved for smoking cessation. It works by blocking both the high and low effects of nicotine. This means it lowers the pleasure of smoking as well as symptoms of withdrawal.

• A new nicotine vaccine may soon be approved for heavy smokers. It would work by blocking nicotine and making inhaled smoke less pleasurable and reinforcing. This vaccine is now being tested in clinical trials and, so far, the results look quite good.

Step 5. Be Prepared for Relapse

Einstein, a famous scientist, once said that insanity is when people repeat the same behavior over and over and expect different results. Most people do not quit for good the first few times they try. But this does not mean it cannot be done. Learn
from each relapse or setback, and then move on. Ask yourself what worked, what
didn’t, and what you can do differently this time.

**Here are some points to keep in mind**

- There are many types of smoking cessation treatments. Each one can work alone, but some are even better when used together.
- If you relapse, try something new next time. This could be a new schedule, NRT or drug. Combine tools, programs, counseling and medication as long as you can do so safely. The important point to keep in mind is to keep trying.
- The more times you quit and relapse, the better your chances of quitting for good. Like the old saying, “If at first you don’t succeed, quit, quit again.”

**Ways to learn more**

National Cancer Institute Smoking Quitline
877/44U-QUIT
[www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/tobacco](http://www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/tobacco)
QuitNet
www.quitnet.org

Smokefree.gov
www.smokefree.gov

Tobacco Cessation Guideline
www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/default.htm

Tobacco Information and Prevention Source (TIPS)
www.cdc.gov/tobacco

WebMD
www.webmd.com/diseases_and_conditions/smoking_cessation.htm

About the Author

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