

Stopping Tobacco Use and Weight Gain

The biggest myths about stopping smoking !

Smoking helps me stay thin...

On average, smokers do weigh less than non-smokers. When you stop smoking the typical weight gain is around 2-3 kg. The nicotine from smoking acts as an appetite suppressant and smoking also increases the rate at which your body burns calories. Smokers will often replace cigarettes with snacking when stopping smoking. People often believe that smoking will help them to control their weight and be healthier. Most people who quit smoking worry about gaining weight. It seems to go with the territory. Learn what you can do to keep your weight under control as you go through the process of recovery from nicotine addiction.

Remember it has taken you a while to develop this habit and it may take time to learn some new ways of managing without tobacco:

- **Emotional habit.** Years of tobacco use may have you programmed to react to literally everything by lighting a cigarette. When we were happy, you may have celebrated by lighting up. When you were angry, smoking would calm you down, or so you thought. Tired? Smoke a cigarette to stay awake. Hungry? Feed yourself a smoke. This list goes on. Your cigarettes were always on the frontline with you, and were the first thing you may have reached for no matter what the reason.
- **Food tastes better.** Without the mask of cigarette smoke covering our taste buds, food is a lot more appealing!
- **Comfort.** Nicotine withdrawal is uncomfortable, and food, for most people brings an almost immediate feeling of comfort and well-being.
- **Meal skipping.** Smokers tend to be meal-skippers, especially at breakfast. Coffee and cigarettes don't make a good meal, and once you quit, eating regular meals again may add extra calories that weren't a part of the diet before quitting.
- **Hand-to-mouth habit.** How many times a day did you lift your hand to your mouth when you smoked? You'd be surprised how ingrained that action can be, and how fidgety you might feel when you're no longer doing it. Putting food in the hand as it goes to your mouth is a common substitute!

So, why do people gain weight when they quit smoking?

Smoking slightly increases metabolism:

Smoking can burn up to 200 calories a day in a heavy smoker. • Because smoking burns calories, metabolism is boosted (increased) slightly.

Nicotine is an appetite suppressant. If your eating habits have remained the same as they were when you smoked, you can easily shed this small gain with a brisk, 30 minute walk daily.

Why do I want to eat more?

Smoking cessation throws our bodies into shock initially. Increased appetite is a side effect of quitting tobacco for most people. One or more of the following reasons may be at play:

The mechanism

Nicotine is a stimulant, and may also interfere with the release of the hormone insulin. Insulin controls glucose levels in the blood. When this function is blocked, a person will become slightly hyperglycaemic (higher blood sugar), and as a result, the body and brain may slow down the production of these hormones and other signals that trigger feelings of hunger.

Food as a replacement for smoking

Early on in a person's quit, the urge to smoke is frequent and may have uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms. It's natural to look for something to ease the discomfort, and food might be used as the replacement. Not only does it fill the void left by the tobacco product, food can be an emotional comfort, eating the pain of withdrawal.

Studies have shown that women are at greater risk than men for returning to smoking as a way to avoid weight gain. Understanding what happens to our bodies when we quit smoking, and what we can do to alleviate discomforts in constructive ways that do not involve weight gain will help you stay on track.

What can I do to avoid gaining weight when I quit smoking?

There are a number of choices you can make to minimize weight gain:

Exercise

Because quitting smoking slows the metabolism, getting some form of daily exercise is very important. To combat excess weight, shoot for at least a half hour of exercise, 5 days a week. It doesn't have to be a high intensity aerobic workout - a brisk 30 minute walk around your neighbourhood will work wonders. Exercise is also a great way to beat cravings to smoke. If you're having a bad day, get out for a walk. It'll clear your mind and improve your attitude.

Healthy Snacks

Put snacks together ahead of time so that when the munchies hit, you've got good food choices within easy reach:

- vegetable sticks - celery, carrot
- Water - drink lots of it!
- fat free yogurt
- frozen grapes
- 94% fat free popcorn
- hard candies to suck on
- herbal teas
- fat free fudgecicles
- sunflower seeds in the shell
- fresh fruit
- hot cocoa made with non-fat milk
- sugar free chewing gum

Don't forget to limit your caffeine intake! If you're concerned about weight gain, do yourself a favour and remove tempting, high fat foods from your home.

Avoid Alcohol

Avoiding alcohol can benefit you in two ways: not only is alcohol high in calories, it can be a huge trigger to smoke. For many people, smoking and drinking go together like a hand in a glove. Avoid the empty calories in alcohol, but more importantly, don't put yourself at risk of relapse by drinking early in your quit.

Accept yourself. You are a wonderful person just as you are right now!

A little bit of planning can go a long way. Be prepared for the urge to eat snack foods and plan to have healthy snacks available. Often the urge is chewy and crunchy foods, consider a carrot or celery stick, because they take longer to eat and satisfy that hand to mouth habit. If you gain a few pounds while going through the process of quitting tobacco, so be it. The benefits will affect your life as well as those who love you in more ways than you can imagine. You *can* quit smoking without gaining a lot of weight.

Don't let the fear of weight gain keep you chained to an addiction that might kill you.