

Stopping smoking: ASH's top tips

Getting professional help

Ring the helpline on Freephone 0800 169 0 169 for information and advice. Pregnant women seeking help in stopping smoking can call the pregnancy Quitline on 0800 169 9169. [Specialist helplines](#) are also available in Asian languages. Your doctor, pharmacist, or health visitor should also give advice and be able to refer you to NHS stop smoking services in your area. See also the [Stopping Smoking](#) section on the ASH website for further resources.

Prepare mentally

You are not alone! Around two-thirds of British smokers would like to quit and about seven million try each year. More than 10 million people in Britain have quit and are now ex-smokers.

However, it can be tough and you will need lots of willpower to break the hold of nicotine – a powerful and addictive drug. An important part of this is to know what you would gain and what you would lose from stopping smoking. A former 60-a-day smoker (and author of best-selling *The Easy Way to Stop Smoking*), the late Allen Carr, said: *“there is absolutely nothing to give up... there is no genuine pleasure or crutch in smoking. It is just an illusion, like banging your head against a wall to make it pleasant when you stop.”*

Demolish smoking myths

Soon after smoking a cigarette the body and brain start to want more nicotine and many people begin to feel increasingly uncomfortable until they have the next cigarette. Smoking feels pleasurable, but much of the pleasure of smoking is relief of withdrawal from nicotine. There are times that many people feel distracted or unable to enjoy themselves because they are not able to smoke. This is nicotine withdrawal in action. If you see it this way, cigarettes are not a familiar friend but more like a greedy parasite demanding constant attention.

Understand what to expect

Most people find the first few days difficult and for some it can be a long struggle, but things will typically start to get better after the third or fourth day. Nicotine withdrawal may make you restless, irritable, frustrated, sleepless, or accident prone - but these things will pass and you will quickly start to feel the benefits. See the [ASH Fact Sheet: Stopping smoking: benefits and aids to quitting](#).

Make a list of reasons why you want to stop smoking

It means different things to different people, but if you know what you want from stopping, it could help you through the most difficult moments.

Reasons could include some or all of:

- Better all-round health - stopping smoking reduces the risk of 50 different illnesses and conditions
- The risk of a heart attack drops by 50% one year after quitting
- Cancer risk drops with every year of not smoking
- Live longer and stay well - one in two long-term smokers die early and lose about 16 years of life
- Set a good example to children - I don't want to be a smoking role model
- Have lots of money to spend on other things - smoking 20 a day costs around £2,000 per year
- Improved fitness and easier breathing – better at sports and getting up stairs
- Better chance of having a healthy baby
- Food and drink tastes better
- Better skin and complexion, and no early wrinkles
- Fresher smelling breath, hair and clothes, and no more cigarette smells around the house
- Back in full control and no longer craving or distracted when I am not smoking or not able to smoke
- Travel on trains, aircraft, buses will be easier
- Work will be easier and I won't have to spend so much time outside
- Don't want to support tobacco companies
- Concern about environmental impact of tobacco growing
- Other reasons.....

Consider the money

Main brand cigarettes now cost around £6.28 for a packet of 20. The table shows how much smoking costs at current prices.

Cigarettes per day	Cost per day	Cost per week	1 Year	5 Years	10 Years	20 Years
5	£1.57	£11.02	£573	£2,865	£5,731	£11,461
10	£3.14	£22.04	£1,146	£5,731	£11,461	£22,922
15	£4.71	£33.06	£1,719	£8,596	£17,192	£34,383
20	£6.28	£44.08	£2,292	£11,461	£22,922	£45,844
40	£12.56	£88.16	£4,584	£22,922	£45,844	£91,688

Set a date

Some people make a New Year's Day resolution, others pick their birthday, and you can join in with others on [No Smoking Day](#) - the second Wednesday of every March - when around two million smokers have a go.

Any day will do, but choosing a date will help mental preparation.

Involve family and friends

If you live with someone else who smokes, it will be much easier to quit if you do it together. One common mistake is not to take the effort to quit smoking seriously enough. Really putting your whole commitment behind it will help you have the right frame of mind to face the challenge.

Deal with the nicotine withdrawal

Nicotine is a powerful addictive drug (see [ASH Fact Sheet: Nicotine and Addiction](#)) and you can roughly double the chances of successfully quitting smoking by using nicotine replacement therapies such as patches, lozenges, inhalers, and/or gum. The idea is to come off nicotine gradually by using a low nicotine dose to take the edge off the cravings and have a 'soft landing'.

There are two alternatives to nicotine products: Zyban (bupropion) and Champix (varenicline) which are only available on prescription. Although both of these are proven to be effective, as with all drugs, there is a risk of side effects and you will need to discuss with your doctor whether either of these forms of therapy would be suitable for you.

Other treatments may help

Hypnosis, acupuncture or other treatments may help some people but there is little evidence to support their effectiveness. Herbal cigarettes are pointless - you get all the tar, but nothing to help you deal with nicotine withdrawal. Quit has a good [guide to treatments](#).

Find a temporary substitute habit

Smoking also involves having something to do with the hands or mouth. Non-smokers manage without this, so it will not be necessary in the long term. But if this is part of the smoking habit, you may need to deal with it. It might be an idea to use chewing gum, drink more water, fruit juice or tea, or to chew or eat something (but see weight gain below!).

Deal with any weight gain worries

Yes it is true: many people do gain weight when they quit smoking. Nicotine changes the appetite and body's energy use (metabolism). Even if you do gain weight it will be worth it if you quit, but if you want to avoid weight-gain then you can prepare. For example, you can change your diet or avoid alcohol, or take more exercise. You may find QUIT's [guide to a healthy body](#) helpful.

Avoid temptation

In the difficult first few days you can change your routine to avoid situations where you would usually smoke.

If you can't stop straight away

You might want to consider cutting down in conjunction with using nicotine replacement therapies. Simply cutting down without setting a target to stop completely rarely works as consumption tends to rise again over time. However, research shows that smokers who cut down and use nicotine replacement products (patches, gum, etc.) increase their chances of stopping smoking altogether. For more information see ASH's [advisory note on the cut down to stop program](#).

Watch out for relapse

You will need to be on your guard especially in the first few days and weeks. "I'll have just one, it can't harm" is the top of a long and slippery slope. If you are upset or under pressure, it is really important to fight off the temptation to smoke – don't let this be an excuse for slipping back. You could lose everything you've achieved just in a momentary lapse.