

Stopping smoking: ASH's top tips

Getting professional help

Ring the Stop Smoking helpline on 0300 123 1044 for information and/or referral to the free NHS Stop Smoking Services. Your doctor, pharmacist, or health visitor should be able to support you to quit or to refer you to 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 15 million people in Britain have quit and are now ex-smokers.

However, some smokers find it challenging to give up nicotine because it is a powerful and addictive drug. Try to think about what you will gain if you stop smoking rather than what you will lose. 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."*

The pleasure myth

Smoking feels pleasurable, but much of the pleasure of smoking is actually relief from nicotine withdrawal. Soon after smoking a cigarette the body starts to crave nicotine and many smokers will feel increasingly uncomfortable until they have the next cigarette. Smokers often report feeling distracted or unable to enjoy themselves when they are not able to smoke. This is nicotine withdrawal in action.

Understand what to expect

Many smokers find the first few days after quitting to be the most difficult 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

Everyone has their own reason for wanting to quit. Thinking about why you decided to quit can help you manage the more difficult moments. Reasons could include:

- To live longer and stay well - half of all long-term smokers die prematurely of a smoking related disease.
- Better all-round health: stopping smoking reduces the risk of 50 different illnesses and conditions.
- The risk of a heart attack drops by a half one year after quitting
- The risk of cancer continues to fall with every year of not smoking

- 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 10 a day costs around £1460 per year
- Improved fitness and easier breathing – better at sports and getting up stairs
- Better chance of having a healthy baby
- Food tastes better
- Better skin; avoid premature wrinkles
- Fresher breath, hair and clothes, and no more cigarette smells around the house
- Back in control of my life, no more cravings
- Travel on trains, aircraft, buses will be easier
- Won't have to keep going outside for smoking break when I'm at work
- Don't want to give money to tobacco companies
- Concern about environmental impact of tobacco growing
- Other reasons.....

Consider the money

Main brand cigarettes now cost around £8.00 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	£2.00	£14.04	£730	£3,650	£7,300	£14,600
10	£4.00	£28.08	£1,460	£7,300	£14,600	£29,200
15	£6.00	£42.12	£2,190	£10,950	£21,900	£43,800
20	£8.00	£56.15	£2,920	£14,600	£29,200	£58,400
40	£16.00	£112.31	£5,840	£29,200	£58,400	£116,800

Set a date

New Year is the most popular time to quit smoking – around half a million smokers will make a quit attempt at this time of year. Others pick their birthday, No Smoking Day - the second Wednesday of every March – or Stoptober as their day to go smokefree.

Ultimately, any day will do: the act of choosing a date will help you to focus and plan.

Involve family and friends

If you live with someone else who smokes, it will be much easier to quit if they quit with you. One common mistake is to underestimate the emotional energy it can take to quit smoking. Making a strong commitment will put you in the right frame of mind.

Deal with the nicotine withdrawal

Nicotine is highly addictive (see [ASH Fact Sheet: Nicotine and Addiction](#)) but you can double your chance of quitting successfully if you use nicotine containing products such as patches, lozenges, inhalers, and/or gum. There is also some evidence that electronic cigarettes are effective as quit aids. The idea is to wean yourself off nicotine by gradually reducing your intake until you don't need it any more. Currently, the evidence suggests that while electronic cigarettes can be effective in helping smokers to quit, the NHS Stop Smoking Services, which combine behavioural support with licensed nicotine replacement therapy, offer the greatest chance of quitting successfully.

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 it is advisable 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 not a suitable alternative - you continue to get all the tar, but nothing to help you deal with nicotine withdrawal. The charity Quit has a good [guide to treatments](#).

Find a temporary substitute habit

Smoking a cigarette gives smokers something to do with their hands or mouth. The popularity of electronic cigarettes may, in part, be due to their satisfying this need. Alternatively, you could chew gum, drink more water, fruit juice or tea, or eat something (but see section on weight gain below!).

Deal with any weight gain worries

Some, but not all, smokers gain weight when they quit. Nicotine changes the appetite and body's energy use (metabolism). Even if you do gain some weight it will be worth it in the long run – and you can always lose it. However, if you want to avoid weight-gain in the first place then you may like to prepare. For example, you could change your diet, avoid alcohol, or take more exercise. An NHS Stop Smoking Advisor will be able to discuss the options with you or your GP can refer you to a dietician.

Avoid temptation

For the first few days it is advisable to change your routine to avoid situations where you would usually smoke.

If you can't stop straight away

Evidence shows that people who give up smoking completely on a specific day are more likely to stay smokefree in the long-term. However, if you aren't ready to quit yet but are concerned about your health, you could consider cutting down the amount of tobacco you use by using nicotine containing products such as patches, gum or electronic cigarettes as a substitute. 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" could lead to relapse and a return to smoking. If you feel under pressure, it is really important to fight off the temptation to smoke – don't let this be a reason for slipping back. It is a good idea to prepare some alternative strategies for coping with stress if your usual coping mechanism is to have a cigarette. An NHS Stop Smoking Advisor can discuss coping strategies with you, or speak to your non-smoking friends to get some ideas about how they deal with stress.