



your health & well-being

Quitting Smoking? You Don't Have to Gain Weight

Many people worry about gaining weight when they quit smoking. Most people do gain weight, but it's usually less than 10 pounds.¹ Most of the gain happens in the first six months after you quit. The good news is that there are steps you can take to minimize your weight gain.

The important thing is to quit smoking. The minute you quit, you'll be starting a much healthier life. Remember:

- Smoking is much worse for your health than gaining a few pounds.
- If you try to lose weight at the same time that you try to quit smoking, you will probably have a harder time quitting. So deal with quitting first, and worry about weight gain when or if it happens.
- While you are trying to quit, focus on eating healthy foods and being more active.

What is the connection between quitting smoking and gaining weight?

The main reason that people gain weight when they quit smoking is simple: They eat more. Why?

- Nicotine curbs your appetite and perks you up when your energy is low. When you quit smoking, you may feel hungry more often and eat more as a result.
- Nicotine dulls your taste buds. When you quit smoking, food tastes better and you may want to eat more.
- Without cigarettes, you may turn to food as a replacement, to keep your hands and mouth busy at times when you used to smoke.
- Nicotine makes your body burn calories faster, so when you quit, your body isn't burning calories as fast as it used to.

Why quit smoking if it's going to make you gain weight?

It's not inevitable. If you do gain a little weight, it's still better than smoking:

- A few extra pounds can be lost later. Serious damage to your lungs if you keep smoking can't be fixed later.
- Most people would have to gain 100 pounds or more to put their health in danger the way smoking does.
- As soon as you quit smoking, you lower your chances of having a heart attack or a stroke.
- After 10 years of not smoking, your chances of getting lung cancer are much lower.

- By quitting, you lower your risk of getting cancers of the voice box, mouth, throat, esophagus, intestine, bladder, kidney, and pancreas.
- When you quit, you get rid of the secondhand smoke that may be putting the health of your family in danger.
- When you quit, you stop smelling like a smoker. You'll have fresher-smelling clothes and fresh breath.
- You'll save money!

Avoiding weight gain

Think positive, and keep temptation away:

- Don't quit smoking during holiday periods. You're more likely to eat more then.
- Stay away from alcohol. Alcoholic drinks have a lot of calories, so avoiding them will help you control your weight. Drinking can weaken your willpower, especially if you usually smoke when you drink.
- Consider getting professional help. Nutritionists, fitness instructors, and therapists can all help you control your weight when you quit smoking.
- Make regular activity part of your life. Try walking or exercising with a partner or group.
- Weigh yourself at least once a week so those extra pounds won't "sneak up" on you.

A big reason people gain weight is that they reach for food instead of a cigarette after they quit.

- When you have a craving for a cigarette or food, remember that cravings usually last only a few minutes. Do something else instead.
- Instead of eating candy or other food to replace the cigarettes, chew on a toothpick, or coffee stirrer.
- If you need something sweet, eat fruit, sugar-free gum, or candy.
- Keep your hands busy so you don't use them to eat. For example, take up knitting, crossword puzzles or sudoku.
- People often turn to food at times of tension or stress. Find other ways to deal with those times. Go for a walk, call a friend, or play with the kids.

Sources: *Healthwise*®

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