



Smoke Signals

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Will I Gain Weight if I Stop Smoking?

Not everyone gains weight when they stop smoking. On average, people who quit smoking gain only about 10 pounds. You are more likely to gain weight when you stop smoking if you have smoked for 10 to 20 years or smoked one or more packs of cigarettes a day. You can control your weight while you quit smoking by making healthy eating and physical activity a part of your life. Although you might gain a few pounds, remember you have stopped smoking and taken a big step toward a healthier life.

What causes weight gain after quitting?

When nicotine, a chemical in cigarette smoke, leaves your body, you may experience:

- Short-term weight gain. The nicotine kept your body weight low, and when you quit smoking, your body returns to the weight it would have been had you never smoked.
- You might gain 3 to 5 pounds due to water retention during the first week after quitting.
- A need for fewer calories. After you stop smoking, you may use fewer calories than when you were smoking.

Will this weight gain hurt my health?

The health risks of smoking are far greater than the risks of gaining 5 to 10 pounds. Smoking causes more than 400,000 deaths each year in the United States. You would have to gain about 100 to 150 pounds after quitting to make your health risks as high as when you smoked.

What Can I Do to Avoid Gaining Weight When I Quit Smoking?

To avoid gaining weight when you quit smoking, you need to become more physically active and improve your eating habits *before* you stop. Physical activity helps to control your weight by increasing the number of calories your body uses. Making healthy changes to your eating habits will prevent weight gain by controlling the amount of calories you eat. Try to reduce your chances of gaining weight by being more physically active and improving your eating habits *before* you stop smoking.

Become More Physically Active

Becoming physically active is a healthy way to control your weight and take your mind off smoking. In one study, women who stopped smoking and added 45 minutes of walking a day gained less than 3 pounds. In addition to helping control your weight, exercise increases your energy, promotes self-confidence, improves your health, and may help relieve the stress and depression caused by the lack of nicotine in your body.

You can become more physically active by spending less time doing activities that use little energy, like watching television and playing video games, and spending more time doing physical activities. Try to do at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day on most days of the week. The activity does not have to be done all at once. It can be done in short spurts — 10 minutes here, 20 minutes there — as long as it adds up to 30 minutes a day. Simple ways to become more physically active include gardening, housework, mowing the lawn, playing actively with children, and taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Improve Your Eating Habits

Try to gradually improve your eating habits. Changing your eating habits too quickly can add to the stress you may feel as you try to quit smoking. Eating a variety of foods is a good way to improve your health. To make sure you get all of the nutrients needed for good health, choose a variety of foods from each group in the Food Guide Pyramid each day. The Nutrition Facts Label that is found on most processed food products can also help you select foods that meet your daily nutritional needs.

Pick a day to quit smoking during a non-stressful period.

For example, try not to quit smoking during holiday seasons when you might be tempted to eat more. Quitting during a stressful time at work or at home might cause extra snacking or a smoking relapse.

Try to focus on quitting smoking and healing your body.

Your first goal should be to quit smoking and let your body heal from the effects of nicotine. After you feel better and are not smoking, work harder on improving your eating and physical activity habits to help you lose any weight that you might have gained.