

# PATIENT EDUCATION



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE PHYSICIANS

## It's Time to Quit Smoking

**Y**ou can be one of the millions of women who have quit smoking. There are more options now than ever to help you quit. Quitting smoking is one of the best things that you can do for your health.

*This pamphlet explains*

- *the dangers of smoking*
- *reasons to quit*
- *how to get started*
- *products to help you quit*
- *what to expect*

### The Dangers of Smoking

Smoking is a leading cause of death in women. Lung cancer causes more deaths in women than any other type of cancer, including breast cancer and **ovarian cancer**. Another smoking-related disease, heart disease, is currently the number-one killer of women in the United States. Death occurs earlier in women who smoke. On average, female smokers die 12 years earlier than female nonsmokers.

Each puff of a cigarette exposes your body to more than 7,000 chemicals. Hundreds of them are toxic. About 70 are **carcinogens**. Listed are some of the chemicals that are found in cigarettes:

- Nicotine—a highly addictive drug
- Carbon monoxide—a toxic gas found in car exhaust fumes
- Arsenic—a poison used in pesticides
- Formaldehyde—a well-known carcinogen

Smoking affects your entire body. The chemicals in cigarette smoke move from your lungs to your blood. The blood in your **arteries** carries them to every organ in your body. When you smoke, it damages your body right away. Smoking even one cigarette is not safe. Cigarette smoking can damage your body in the following ways:

- **Immune system**—When you smoke, your lungs and blood vessels become inflamed and damaged. This constant **inflammation** keeps tissues from healing. Your immune system is always fighting damage from tobacco smoke. This weakens it and makes it harder for your body to fight other diseases.
- **Cancer**—Smoking damages **DNA**, the instructions inside **cells** that control their growth. This damage can cause cancer. Almost one third of all cancer deaths are linked to smoking. Smoking can cause or contribute to cancer in many organs of the body, including the mouth, nose, throat, lungs, breast, pancreas, **bladder**, and **cervix**.

- **Cardiovascular disease**—Smoking changes blood chemistry, which can lead to high levels of **cholesterol**. Fatty deposits called plaques can build up in arteries, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke.
- Lung disease—Smoking scars the lungs and can lead to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a serious illness that makes it hard to breathe. Smokers cough more and get infections like **bronchitis** and **pneumonia** more often than nonsmokers.
- Reproductive system—For women, smoking can contribute to **infertility**. Smoking during pregnancy increases the risks of several complications, including problems with the **placenta**, low birth weight, **prelabor rupture of membranes (PROM)**, and **preterm** birth. Women who smoke are more likely to go through **menopause** earlier than women who do not smoke.

Smoking also affects your appearance. Smokers tend to develop wrinkles earlier than those who do not smoke. The teeth and fingers may be yellow from tobacco smoke. Because smoking depletes the body of **oxygen**, a smoker's skin may appear pale or gray. Smokers tire easily and are not able to be as physically active as nonsmokers. All of these factors can make smokers look years older than they actually are.

## Secondhand Smoke

People who are around smokers may develop health problems from being exposed to secondhand smoke and even thirdhand smoke (the smoke and chemicals left behind on clothing, furniture, and carpets). Any exposure to cigarette smoke is harmful. In children, secondhand smoke can cause serious health problems, including asthma, lung infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia, and middle ear infections. Infants exposed to secondhand smoke are at increased risk of **sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)**.

## Reasons to Quit

Quitting takes effort and commitment, but millions of women have quit smoking for good. You can be one of them.

Quitting is one of the best things you can do for your health and your family's health as well (see Box "Health Rewards of Quitting"). The sooner you quit, the sooner your body starts to heal. There also are other benefits to quitting that you may not have thought of:

- You will look better and have more energy.
- Your teeth and hands will be less yellow.
- You will have more money in your pocket.
- You will be free from having to find a place to smoke.
- You will never have to worry about running out of cigarettes.

- The smell of cigarettes will fade from your clothes, car, and home.
- You will set a good example for your children and others.

Many women who are thinking about quitting worry about gaining weight. On average, the amount of weight gained is less than 10 pounds. If you are concerned about gaining weight, there are things you can do to keep the weight off while you quit smoking (see Box "Tips to Keep Your Weight Down When You Quit").

## How to Get Started

Some people quit smoking without planning. Others need to plan to quit smoking. Follow these steps to help you get started:

- Decide that you want to quit. Avoid thinking about how hard it might be. Instead, imagine your life free of cigarettes.
- Find a support group. People who get support from others online, on the phone, with a counselor, or in groups have a higher chance of success. You can

## Health Rewards of Quitting

As soon as you stop smoking you will notice a change in your health:

### *Within 12 hours of quitting*

- levels of carbon monoxide and nicotine in your system decrease quickly
- your heart and lungs begin to repair the damage caused by cigarette smoke

### *Within a few days of quitting*

- your sense of smell and taste may improve

### *Within 3 months of quitting*

- your circulation improves
- you breathe easier
- you cough less
- your voice sounds less hoarse

### *Within 1 year of quitting*

- your risk of having a heart attack decreases by 50%

### *Within 5 years of quitting*

- your risk of certain types of cancer decreases by 50%
- your risk of stroke is reduced to nearly that of a nonsmoker

### *Within 10 years of quitting*

- your risk of dying from lung cancer decreases by 50%

## Tips to Keep Your Weight Down When You Quit

- Follow a regular exercise program.
- Cut out high-calorie drinks like soft drinks and sweetened tea.
- Drink a glass of water before each meal.
- Pay attention to portion size. For example, a serving of meat is the size of a deck of cards. A serving of broccoli is the size of a baseball.
- Have low-calorie foods for snacks—fruits and vegetables, fruit juices, or popcorn without butter.
- Substitute low-fat and low-calorie foods for high-calorie foods. For example, instead of sour cream on your potato, try low-fat or nonfat yogurt. Have fruit for dessert instead of cake or pie. Try turkey burgers instead of beef burgers.

contact the local chapter of the American Lung Association, the American Cancer Society, Nicotine Anonymous, or other local groups to help you quit. You also can call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for free advice and support.

- Focus on your reasons for quitting—to improve your health, protect your family, or save money. These reasons will help keep you going.
- Tell your family and friends that you plan to stop smoking. Get their support. If they smoke, you may want to ask them to quit too. It may help to have a friend quit with you.
- Find out about products that are available to help you quit smoking (see “Products to Help You Quit”).
- Know what to expect when you quit. Learn how to handle urges to smoke and the stress that comes along with quitting. Know what your “triggers” to smoke are and think about the ways you will deal with these triggers when you no longer smoke.
- Set a target date for quitting. Choose a date that is in the near future—a few days or weeks. Mark the date on your calendar. Setting a date will help you keep track of the exact day you became a nonsmoker—a date you can celebrate each year.
- Tell your health care professional that you are quitting smoking. Smoking is a physical addiction. Your health care professional can help you design a quit plan that has the best chance of working for you.

## Products to Help You Quit

There are many products that can help you quit smoking. Talk to your health care professional if you are interested in these products. You also can find out more about these products at <http://tobacco-cessation.org/whatworkstoquit>.

## Nicotine Replacement Products

To help you quit, you may want to try nicotine replacement products. Nicotine is an addictive drug, just like cocaine or heroin. Nicotine changes the way your brain works. When you smoke, nicotine causes the release of a chemical that gives you a feeling of pleasure. This feeling does not last long. You crave the next cigarette to get that feeling again. Going too long without a cigarette causes withdrawal symptoms, such as feeling anxious or irritable.

Nicotine replacement products release nicotine into your body, but without the harmful chemicals found in tobacco. These products help relieve cravings and withdrawal symptoms while you get used to life without smoking. They are available in a special chewing gum, lozenge, skin patch, nasal spray, or inhaler.

You can buy some of these products over the counter. Others require a prescription. Certain health insurance plans cover the cost of nicotine replacement products. Your health care professional can help you decide which product is right for you. You also can use more than one of these products. For example, you can use the patch to ease withdrawal symptoms and the gum to manage sudden urges to smoke. Talk with your health care professional about combining products.

Nicotine replacement products have not been adequately studied in pregnant women. If you are pregnant, you should use these products only with the close supervision of your health care professional. You should weigh the possible risks of using these products during pregnancy against the known risks of smoking during pregnancy.

## Medications

A medication that may help you quit smoking is bupropion. This drug is an *antidepressant*. It helps reduce both the urge to smoke and withdrawal symptoms. It must be prescribed by your health care professional. The treatment begins 2 weeks before your quit date. Treatment usually lasts about 7–12 weeks, but it can last longer if necessary. Bupropion can be used with nicotine replacement therapy. Possible side effects include dry mouth, difficulty sleeping, dizziness, headaches, and skin rashes.

Varenicline is another drug that is prescribed to people who are trying to quit smoking. This drug blocks the pleasant effects of nicotine on the brain, which can help break the addiction cycle. The treatment begins 1 week before your quit date. Treatment lasts 12 weeks. Possible side effects include unusual dreams and stomach upset.

Both varenicline and bupropion have been linked to *depression*, changes in behavior, hostility, agitation, and thoughts of suicide. If you experience changes in behavior or suicidal thoughts while taking either drug, stop taking the medication and report your symptoms to your health care professional.

Varenicline has not been studied in pregnant women. Information about bupropion is limited, but it does not appear to increase the risk of birth defects or other problems during pregnancy. Both drugs can be passed to your baby in breast milk. Most experts

recommend using these drugs during pregnancy only if the benefits of quitting outweigh their possible risks to your pregnancy.

## What to Expect

When your quitting date comes, throw away all your cigarettes. Clean your clothes to get rid of the cigarette smell. Remove all tobacco from your home, car, and workplace.

Try to keep busy on your quitting day—exercise, go to the movies, or take long walks. It may help to spend most of your free time in places where smoking is not allowed, such as a library, store, or museum. Remind your family and friends that this is your quitting day.

The first week after quitting is the hardest time. You may feel irritable, anxious, and hungry. You may have trouble sleeping. You may feel dizzy or drowsy and have headaches. These withdrawal symptoms may begin within a few hours, peak in 2–3 days, and last up to a month. Your health care professional can suggest ways to help you get through the withdrawal stage. Nicotine replacement products usually help.

You may have mental urges to smoke as well, especially if you associate smoking with certain activities like waking up, drinking coffee or alcohol, finishing a meal, or being with friends. It helps to know what your triggers are before you quit and plan what to do when you crave a cigarette. Some people use substitutes to deal with cravings (see Box “Cigarette Substitutes”). Remember, however, that each urge to smoke lasts only a short time. Eventually, they will become less frequent and intense.

If you have a cigarette, do not give up. One slip does not mean you have failed and cannot continue with your attempt to quit. It takes time and patience to quit a habit. Many people have to try more than once—and try more than one method—before they become former smokers. Think about what was happening that caused you to slip. Make a plan to either avoid the situation or develop a way to cope if it happens again.

## Depression

People who quit smoking are at risk of depression, especially if they have had an episode of depression before. Women are more likely to have depression than men. Many smokers are unaware that they have depression and that they are using nicotine as a self-treatment. Quitting smoking can unmask undiagnosed depression.

It makes sense for women trying to quit smoking to be on the lookout for signs and symptoms of depression, such as feeling sad, lack of interest in activities you used to enjoy, and sleeping too much or having trouble falling asleep. You may have depression if these feelings happen nearly every day and last for at least 2 weeks. If you think you have depression, contact your health care professional. There are treatments that can help you feel better. If you have thoughts of suicide, seek help right away.

## Cigarette Substitutes

When you miss having a cigarette, resist the temptation. Here are some tips to try.

*Put something else in your mouth:*

- Carrot sticks
- Sugarless gum
- Sunflower seeds
- Sugar-free hard candy

*Keep your hands busy by playing with one of the following:*

- Pencil
- Paper clip
- Small rubber ball
- Computer mouse
- Rubber band

*Engage in activities that make smoking hard:*

- Take a shower.
- Exercise.
- Clean the house.
- Wash the car.
- Paint your nails.
- Go to a place where you cannot smoke—a mall, a movie theater, or a restaurant.
- Knit or crochet.
- Play a game on a hand-held device.
- Send a text message to a supportive friend or quit buddy.

*Focus on something else:*

- Do crossword puzzles.
- Take 10 slow deep breaths.

If you have a history of depression, you may have a harder time quitting smoking. You may have more withdrawal symptoms. You are more likely to have another episode of depression after you quit. Depression may make you want to smoke again because nicotine makes you feel better. You will need extra support and follow-up when you quit smoking. Your health care professional may prescribe bupropion. This antidepressant will help both with quitting smoking and treating possible depression.

## Finally...

Now is the time to quit smoking. It is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your family. Quitting often takes several tries. Do not get discouraged. Do not give up. Talk with your health care professional—he or she can help you live smoke-free.

## Glossary

**Antidepressant:** A drug that is used to treat depression.

**Arteries:** Blood vessels that carry oxygen-rich blood from the heart to the rest of the body.

**Bladder:** A hollow, muscular organ in which urine is stored.

**Bronchitis:** A lung disease that causes coughing and shortness of breath.

**Carcinogens:** Any substances that cause cancer.

**Cardiovascular Disease:** Disease of the heart and blood vessels.

**Cells:** The smallest units of a structure in the body. Cells are the building blocks for all parts of the body.

**Cervix:** The lower, narrow end of the uterus at the top of the vagina.

**Cholesterol:** A natural substance that is a building block for cells and hormones. This substance helps carry fat through the blood vessels for use or storage in other parts of the body.

**Depression:** Feelings of sadness for periods of at least 2 weeks.

**DNA:** The genetic material that is passed down from parent to child. DNA is packaged in structures called chromosomes.

**Immune System:** The body's natural defense system against viruses and bacteria that cause disease.

**Infertility:** The inability to get pregnant after 1 year of having regular sexual intercourse without the use of birth control.

**Inflammation:** Pain, swelling, redness, and irritation of tissues in the body.

**Menopause:** The time when a woman's menstrual periods stop permanently. Menopause is confirmed after 1 year of no periods.

**Ovarian Cancer:** Cancer that affects one or both of the ovaries.

**Oxygen:** An element that we breathe in to sustain life.

**Placenta:** An organ that provides nutrients to and takes waste away from the fetus.

**Pneumonia:** An infection of the lungs.

**Prelabor Rupture of Membranes (PROM):** Rupture of the amniotic membranes that happens before labor begins. Also called premature rupture of membranes.

**Preterm:** Less than 37 weeks of pregnancy.

**Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS):** The unexpected death of an infant in which the cause is unknown.

This information was designed as an educational aid to patients and sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. It is not intended as a statement of the standard of care, nor does it comprise all proper treatments or methods of care. It is not a substitute for a treating clinician's independent professional judgment. Please check for updates at [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org) to ensure accuracy.

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