



QUIT.ie

A guide to help you quit smoking



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Quit smoking for 28 days and you're 5 times more likely to quit for good

If you smoke, quitting is one of the best things you can do for your health.

Seven out of every 10 people who smoke want to quit. If you're one of them, this booklet can help you to succeed.

There is information in this booklet on:

- supports available to quit smoking
- reasons to quit smoking
- tips to help you quit
- medicines that can help you quit smoking
- e-cigarettes and vaping.

Remember, it is never too late to quit smoking and you should never give up trying.

Supports available to help you quit smoking

To help you quit smoking the HSE provides free:

- support
- advice
- stop smoking medications, including nicotine replacement therapy (NRT).

On page 18 you will find information on how we can help you, including how to access this support.



Reasons to quit smoking

There are lots of good reasons to stop smoking:

- smoking is bad for you
- 1 in 2 smokers will die of tobacco-related disease
- the health benefits of quitting start right away

There are other benefits to quitting smoking too. When you stop smoking, you:

- improve your breathing and reduce the strain on your heart and lungs
- protect your family from second-hand smoke
- improve the air quality in your home
- have nicer smelling clothes
- will be a good role model for your family and friends
- save money
- have better skin, teeth and hair
- take control of your daily routine
- save time and energy – you will not have to think about when and where you can smoke
- reduce your risk of life-threatening diseases.

Michael, smoked for 20 years

“I was a smoker for 20 years, but thanks to the QUIT service for the last 100 days I can call myself an ex-smoker. My QUIT plan on the website tells me that I have saved €2,100 and I have not smoked 3000 cigarettes since I stopped smoking!”

You will be amazed at the **freedom** you will feel when you quit.



Physical health benefits

The benefits from stopping smoking increase over time.



After 20 minutes

Your circulation improves. Your blood pressure and heart rate get lower, which means your risk of a heart attack starts to reduce.

After 8 hours

The carbon monoxide (poisonous gas) levels in your blood go down and the oxygen level rises.



After 48 hours

Carbon monoxide leaves your body. Your sense of smell and taste starts to improve.



After 2-3 months

Your lung capacity could increase by up to 30%.

After 72 hours

Your breathing improves and your energy levels increase.



After 10 years

Your risk of lung cancer is reduced by half.



After 1 year

Your chance of having a heart attack drops by half.

After 5 years

Your risk of smoking-related cancers is greatly reduced.



After 15 years

Your risk of having a heart attack is now the same as a non-smoker.



Mental health benefits

Stopping smoking can improve your mood and help relieve stress, anxiety and depression. When people stop smoking, they:

- reduce levels of anxiety, depression and stress
- feel better about themselves
- feel more in control
- can get better quality sleep.

Stopping smoking can help reduce symptoms of anxiety disorders and depression in the same way as being treated with antidepressants. There is a common misunderstanding that smoking relieves stress or anxiety and improves your mood. However, withdrawal from nicotine in cigarettes can cause symptoms similar to anxiety.



When you are addicted to nicotine, your body goes through periods where nicotine levels are high (like just after a cigarette or vape).



Likewise, your body has periods where nicotine levels are low (like a few hours after your last cigarette or vape).



The symptoms of withdrawal when nicotine levels drop in your body are similar to the symptoms of anxiety and stress. This is why people sometimes think that smoking helps with their stress and anxiety.

Using **nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)** when quitting will help with these symptoms (see page 21 for more information on NRT).

Smoking facts

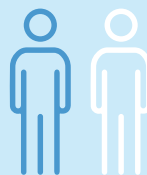
Every week, almost

100
people die and
1,000

people are hospitalised
in Ireland from a
smoking-related illness.



Smoking kills.
One in 2 smokers
will die from a
tobacco-related
disease.



Smoking takes 10 to 15 years
off your life and can cause:

- cancer
- heart attacks
- stroke
- lung disease
- blindness.



Smoking is linked
to an increased
risk of dementia,
diabetes and many
other diseases.



Smoking has a
negative effect
on your mental
health.



Smoking reduces fertility for
both women and men and
makes it harder to get pregnant.
It can lead to:

- ectopic pregnancy
- miscarriage
- stillbirth
- poor growth of
the preterm baby.



It is an expensive
habit – smoking
20 cigarettes a day
adds up to over
€6,500 a year.



83% of smokers
regret starting smoking.
If they had the choice
again, they would
have never started.

Three steps to help you quit smoking

Step 1

Prepare to quit

Step 2

Set a quit date

Step 3

Stay quit

Step 1: Prepare to quit

The sooner you quit, the better for you and your health.
Are you ready to quit?

Here are some things to think about while you get ready to quit.

Be prepared

Think about why you're still smoking. Look at the statements in the table below – do any of these sound like you?

I haven't got the willpower.

Willpower just means wanting something badly enough.
Ask yourself if you really want to quit and if so, go for it!

Taking nicotine replacement therapies (NRT) to manage cravings can really help.



Sofia, smoked for 12 years

"I firmly believe that sitting down and thinking about your reasons to quit is a fantastic way to start, there are thousands of negatives from smoking and no positives which puts you in a great mindset early on."

I am worried about withdrawal symptoms.

Withdrawal symptoms mean your body is recovering from the harmful effects of smoking. These can be uncomfortable, but they are temporary – most symptoms stop after a month.

NRT can help reduce withdrawal symptoms.

Smoking helps me cope with stress.

Did you know people who quit smoking actually report feeling less stressed? Try to work off stress with exercise instead, talk to a friend or take up a new activity.

The HSE has information and advice about your health and wellbeing. You can find support at **yourmentalheath.ie**

It's too late – the damage is probably done.

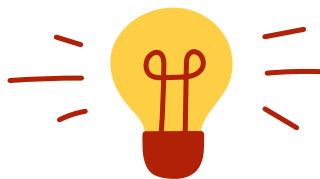
It's never too late to quit. Once you quit, the benefits start from day one. After a year you will have cut your risk of heart attack by half.

This isn't the right time.

You might think that there will never be a right time. Think positively. The right time is now.



Here are some useful ideas to help you prepare to quit



Think about the good and bad

It may help to write down what you:

- like and don't like about smoking
- think is good and bad about quitting.

You can use the example below to make a list.

Keep your list close to hand to remind you why you're quitting.

What I like about smoking

1	
2	
3	
4	

What I don't like about smoking

1	
2	
3	
4	

The bad things about quitting are

1	
2	
3	
4	

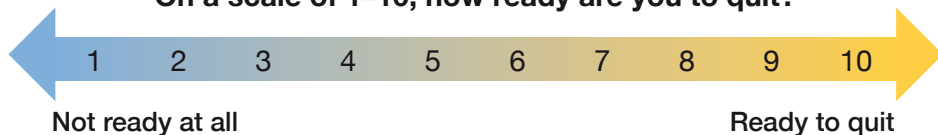
The good things about quitting are

1	
2	
3	
4	

Think about how ready you are to quit

Now that you have looked at the good and bad of smoking and quitting smoking, do you think you are ready to quit?

On a scale of 1–10, how ready are you to quit?



Keep a smoking diary

It is helpful to know when and why you smoke during the day. Over the next week, choose one day and use the table below to keep a note of your nicotine cravings for that day. This will help you plan how to manage these cravings in the future.

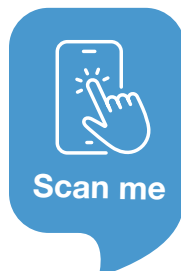
Here is an example

Time of cigarette	9 am				
What I was doing at this time	Having a coffee				
How much I needed to smoke (1 = a little, 5 = a lot)	1	2	3	4	5
Number I smoked	3				
How much I enjoyed it	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 😞		<input type="checkbox"/> 😞		<input type="checkbox"/> 😊

Think about how much smoking costs you

Smoking is expensive and saving money may be a reason for you to quit smoking.

You can use the savings calculator to work out how much you could save:
quit.hse.ie/savings-calculator



Tony, smoked for almost 50 years

“I continued to meet my Stop Smoking Advisor every 2 weeks until I finally stopped. Now, not only was I getting better but also I was saving a lot of money. Prior to quitting, I did not realise how much I was spending on tobacco. I decided to put my savings to good use and get something that would remind me why I quit - I bought a new car.”



Step 2: Set a quit date

Set a quit date now

My quit date is ____ / ____ / ____

Think about the situations where you smoke or normally want to smoke and think about what you can do instead.

My difficult times

Example: having a cup of coffee

What I plan to do at these times

I will drink tea instead



Cravings and withdrawal when you stop smoking

Most people experience some nicotine cravings and withdrawal symptoms when they give up smoking. These can be uncomfortable, but they are temporary.

Most symptoms stop after a month.

You may experience some symptoms, but you probably won't experience them all.

If you're concerned about any symptoms, talk to:

- your GP
- your stop smoking advisor – they can give you information and advice on how to stop smoking and how to manage cravings and withdrawal.

Cravings

The cravings you have depend on how often you smoked and for how long you were a smoker.

Cravings for nicotine can start 30 minutes after your last cigarette. Individual cravings usually pass in 3 to 5 minutes.

You may get the most cravings 2 to 3 days after you stop smoking. While you may have cravings for some time after you quit smoking, this will happen less often and they will be less intense. You will also learn how to cope with these cravings over time.

Deal with cravings by using the **4Ds**:

Delay



Delay at least 3-5 minutes and the urge will pass.

Distract



Distract yourself by focusing on something else.

Drink



Drink a cold glass of water or fruit juice.

Deep breaths



Deep breaths – take 20 deep breaths.

Withdrawal symptoms – what can help?

Cough

Coughing more than usual is a common withdrawal symptom of quitting smoking. This is a sign that your body is starting to heal, as it clears the mucus that has built up in your lungs. Speak to your pharmacist or GP if this is causing you discomfort.

Moods, irritability and anxiety

When you give up smoking, you may:

- have low moods
- feel more irritable and anxious.

These feelings are temporary and get better within about 4 weeks.

Here are some coping strategies:

- congratulate yourself for coping with life without smoking
- ask others to understand and be patient
- do things that make you feel good.

You can relax and reduce stress with activities you enjoy, like:

- physical activities like walking, jogging, dancing, cycling or swimming
- listening to music, reading, doing a puzzle or gardening
- relaxation and deep-breathing exercises – for example, take 20 deep breaths.



Headaches

Nicotine withdrawal when you stop smoking can cause headaches. They usually stop within 3 to 4 weeks.

To reduce headaches, make sure you:

- drink plenty of water
- eat regularly
- take regular physical activity.

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) can also help to reduce withdrawal symptoms.

Sleep problems

You may have sleep problems after stopping smoking. These usually stop after 2 to 3 weeks.

To improve your sleep, you can try to:

- reduce your caffeine intake, like avoiding tea, coffee or cola
- do physical activity during the day
- relax before bedtime with a book or a bath
- stop your screen time (TV, phone or computers) for an hour before bed
- do mindfulness or meditation before bed.



A pharmacist can recommend treatments to ease the problem.

Energy levels

Your energy might increase after you stop smoking. This is because more oxygen is getting into your bloodstream as the carbon monoxide has left your body.

The extra oxygen may also cause you to feel dizzy or lightheaded for 1 to 2 days. This is normal as your body gets used to the extra oxygen.

Some people find that they have less energy for a while. This is because the body stops producing adrenaline in response to nicotine. This is temporary and improves after 2 to 3 weeks.

Weight gain

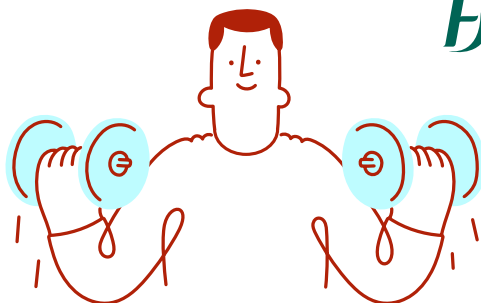
Most smokers worry that giving up smoking will make them gain weight. It can happen if you confuse cravings for nicotine with cravings for food and replace smoking with snacking. But you can avoid gaining any weight if you eat sensibly and get more active.

If you are worried about weight gain:

- remember that stopping smoking is the most important thing you can do for your health
- eat 3 balanced meals a day, with plenty of vegetables and fruit
- keep healthy snacks to hand, like celery, carrot sticks or fruit
- drink water or low-calorie drinks and avoid sugary soft drinks.



Tips to stay active



Move	Anyone can get active and it's never too late to start. Anything that gets you moving will benefit you, whatever your age.
Enjoy	Chose an activity that you enjoy, it will be easier to keep it up.
Start slowly	<p>If you are not regularly active:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● start slowly with 10–15 minutes, three to four times a week ● gradually build up to 30 minutes a day, most days of the week.
Pace yourself	Exercise at a pace that suits you. You should sweat slightly and be able to carry on a conversation when exercising.
Avoid boring activity	If you get bored with an activity, try a different one.
Be kind to yourself	Everyone has days when they might not do some or all of an activity. Just get back on track the next day.
Build physical activity into your daily routine	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● walk to work or the shops ● use the stairs instead of a lift.
Check with your doctor if needed	If you have any medical problems or concerns, check with your doctor before you start a new activity.

Step 3: Stay quit

To help you stay off cigarettes, do some or all of the following:

Stay positive	When you feel tired and tempted to give in, remember how far you've come and why you quit. Stay determined and the temptation will pass.
Be active	Choose an activity that you enjoy, it will be easier to keep it up.
Keep busy	Boredom can make smoking seem more important to you than it really is.
Save your money and reward yourself	Take a trip to the cinema, buy yourself a gift or an item of clothing that you like.
Be careful when drinking alcohol	A few drinks can make you forget that you have quit smoking and weaken your willpower.
Remember not to have a puff of a cigarette	Having even one puff of a cigarette after you have quit can lead to more. This is due to the nicotine receptors being stimulated and the feel-good endorphins being released.
Change your attitude towards smoking	Think about the freedom you'll have when you finally break free and take back control.
Don't lose faith	Some people may find that it takes a few attempts before they quit for good. If this happens to you, think about the reasons you wanted to quit in the first place and get ready to quit again.

Remember you are not alone, the HSE QUIT team are here to help.

You can contact a trained stop smoking advisor to support you.

**Freephone: 1800 201 203
or Free text: QUIT to 50100**

Tips on changing your habits

Your normal habits and routines may make you want to smoke, especially if cigarettes were a part of your routine.

These are things you can do to try to change your habits:

- brush your teeth and use mouthwash first thing in the morning
- brush your teeth after meals if you can, or move to another room
- change your usual drink so you do not associate the new drink with smoking
- chew sugarless gum in situations where you used to smoke
- walk away from others who are smoking
- distract yourself by scrolling on your phone or log into your QUIT plan
- try deep breathing
- change your routine before bed – have a bath or read a book.



Get help when you quit smoking

If you want to stop smoking, getting the right help can double your chances of success.

You can get help to quit through:

- one-to-one sessions at a stop smoking clinic in your area or on the phone
- group support sessions
- our online **QUIT plan**
- our QUIT text service
- information on our quit.ie page or app.
- support from family and friends.

Whether you choose one-to-one support or attend a group, the stop smoking advisors will:

- ask about your smoking history and habit
- assess your nicotine addiction
- measure your carbon monoxide levels
- recommend medical treatment that might work for you.

Our advisors know how hard it is to quit. They will support you every step of the way without judgement.



Pat, smoked for over 40 years

“What I found most helpful with the HSE Quit service was the one-to-one chats I had with my HSE Stop Smoking Advisor.”

One-to-one support

At our stop smoking clinics we offer one-to-one support by phone, video call or in person. This support is free.

A stop smoking advisor will support you through the quitting process. This starts 1 to 4 weeks before your quit date and can continue for up to a year.

Group support

Our 'We Can QUIT' group support sessions last 7 to 12 weeks. Groups meet for an hour and a half, once a week.

The groups can be female only, male only or mixed. The sessions are run by local organisations in places like community centres or family resource centres.

The sessions are facilitated by a trained stop smoking advisor.

At the sessions, you can:

- check your progress
- talk about any difficulties you are having
- swap coping tips
- encourage each other.

Find out more at hse.ie/wecanquit

QUIT plan

You can sign up for a free, personalised QUIT plan to help you stop smoking.

You decide how you want your plan to work and can get:

- daily support by email and text message
- a QUIT account to track your progress
- one-to-one support from a trained advisor
- tips from people who've successfully stopped smoking.

HSE App

You can also get support and find out more information about all of the above by downloading the HSE app.

QUIT text service

You can receive motivational text messages to help keep you focused on your quitting journey.

Free text QUIT to 50100

Online support

‘You Can QUIT’ is an online community for people trying to quit smoking. To find out more, visit our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/hsequit

Support from family and friends

You should look for support from family and friends when you are quitting.

How your family and friends can help:

- tell them that you have quit smoking and ask them to be positive and patient
- ask them to get involved in a new activity with you, like walking or taking up a new class.

If you have a friend or family member that smokes:

- ask them not to smoke around you and not to offer you cigarettes
- agree on smoke-free spaces, for example, create a smoke-free home and car.

You may want to quit smoking, but you cannot force others to quit. That’s a decision they have to make for themselves.



Rachel, HSE Stop Smoking Advisor

“When supporting people to quit, I listen to their reasons why they want to quit and what has stopped them before. We come up with a plan that will fit around their life. Everyone is different so each quitting journey is personalised.”

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)

Smoking is addictive. Nicotine is the ingredient in cigarettes that makes them addictive.

It is what makes it hard to give up smoking.

What is NRT?

NRT are licenced medicines that give you a low level of nicotine. They do not contain the other poisonous chemicals present in tobacco smoke. For example, tar and carbon monoxide.

There are different types of NRT:

- patch
- gum
- lozenge
- mouth spray.

Your GP, pharmacist or stop smoking advisor can help you decide which type of NRT is right for you.

How does NRT work?

NRT provides just enough nicotine to relieve cravings and withdrawal symptoms, like:

- restlessness
- anxiety
- lack of concentration
- hunger pangs.

NRT relieves physical withdrawal symptoms. This helps you to focus on the psychological (emotional) aspects of quitting.



NRT patch

For NRT to work, you must use it:

- the right way – your stop smoking advisor, pharmacist or GP can explain how
- for long enough – usually for 8 to 12 weeks
- at the right amount for your level of nicotine addiction.



What is combination NRT?

We recommend combination NRT as the best way to stop smoking. Combination NRT means using:

- a fast-acting form of NRT like gum or lozenges, and
- a nicotine patch at the same time.

Getting NRT

You can get free NRT when you sign up to the stop smoking programme.

To get NRT for free, you can contact:

- our stop smoking advisors – they will arrange for you to get NRT through your GP or a participating pharmacy
- our QUIT line on 1800 201 203
- your GP – if you have a medical card.

You can also buy NRT in pharmacies or some supermarkets.

There are some situations when you might need medical supervision before starting NRT.

Talk to your GP if you:

- are pregnant
- are under 18
- have recently had a heart attack.

Side effects of NRT

NRT is a safe medicine. People who use it rarely experience problems. Read the instructions before you use NRT. Side effects are usually mild, but talk to your GP, stop smoking advisor or pharmacist if you are worried. You may need to change the dose or type of NRT.

If NRT did not work for you in the past

If you have tried one type of NRT before without success, do not give up on it completely. You may not have used it properly or for long enough. Try again and follow the instructions carefully. You could also be in a different frame of mind this time.

NRT is not swapping one addiction for another

Some people think that using NRT is just swapping one addiction for another. But this is not true. Using NRT doubles your chances of quitting smoking compared to quitting cold turkey.

The nicotine levels in NRT are much lower than in tobacco. The way they deliver nicotine makes them less addictive than smoking.

Most health problems are caused by other components in tobacco smoke, not by the nicotine. It is safer to use licenced nicotine-containing products than to smoke.

People who use NRT can reduce their use of it over a period of time and eventually stop using it. A stop smoking advisor can talk to you about how to use NRT in a way that is safe and that works.



Prescription treatments to quit smoking

You can get medicine on prescription to help you stop smoking. Your GP or a stop smoking advisor can help you decide the best treatment for you.

Prescription treatments can reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms include restlessness, irritability, low mood and weight gain.

Make an appointment with your GP before you plan to give up smoking. You need to start taking the medicine around 2 weeks before your quit date.

Types of medicine to quit smoking

Varenicline (formerly known as Champix) and Zyban are safe and licenced medicines. They are used under medical supervision. Your GP or stop smoking advisor will discuss with you how to take the medicine to help you stop smoking.

While side effects are not common, like any medicine some people may experience them.

Varenicline

This medicine:

- acts on your brain to reduce cravings for and symptoms of nicotine withdrawal
- is taken for 12 weeks and you continue to smoke for the first 7 to 14 days.

Zyban (bupropion HCL SR)

This medicine:

- acts on your brain to help treat nicotine addiction
- is taken for 11 weeks and you continue to smoke for the first two weeks.

Varenicline and Zyban do not include nicotine.

You can use a prescription medicine in combination with NRT. It is safe and recommended in Ireland's National Clinical Guideline on Stop Smoking Care.

Remember

Always read the instructions and use medicines as directed

These medicines work best over three months, so try to stick to this to get the most benefit and the right result so you can quit smoking for good!

If these stop smoking medications are unsuitable for you, your GP or stop smoking advisor may recommend combination NRT instead.

The Drugs Payment Scheme (DPS) can help with the costs of prescription medicines. There is no means test for the DPS.

NRT mouth spray



Vaping (using e-cigarettes)

What are e-cigarettes?

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are battery-powered devices. They heat nicotine mixed with flavourings and other chemicals to create an aerosol that the user inhales.

Using an e-cigarette is known as vaping. Anyone who is near a person who is vaping also breathes in this aerosol.

Compared to regular (tobacco) cigarettes, vaping may be less harmful. This does not mean that it is harm-free. E-cigarettes contain harmful and potentially harmful substances. Examples of these include:

- volatile compounds
- heavy metals like tin, lead and nickel
- ultrafine particles
- chemicals that cause cancer.

Vaping to stop smoking

We do not recommend vaping as a way to stop smoking

If you smoke and want to stop, we recommend you:

- get support from a stop smoking advisor, GP or pharmacist
- use licensed stop smoking medicines as described on the previous pages.

We have reviewed the studies of vaping as a stop smoking support. Compared to the options we recommend we are not confident that vaping is a safe or effective way to stop smoking. We will continue to review new studies.

E-cigarettes are not stop smoking medicines

E-cigarettes are not licensed medicines. Licensed stop smoking medicines go through quality and safety checks before they can be sold.

There are some regulations for e-cigarettes and vaping liquids as consumer products. However, the system for licensed medicines is much stricter.

Get support to quit for good

If you are vaping as a way to help you quit smoking, you can still work with a stop smoking advisor. They can give you free advice and support to quit smoking for good.

If you don't smoke cigarettes but you vape, does the HSE provide stop-vaping services?

The HSE stop smoking service has been designed for people who smoke cigarettes.

However, we think that these supports may also help people who wish to stop vaping. If we have the capacity, we will provide support and advice to those who wish to stop vaping. We continue to research ways to set up safe and effective services to help people stop vaping. There is good evidence to show that advice and support can help people address things like smoking, vaping, drinking and drug use.



Stop smoking for 28 days
and you're 5 times more
likely to **quit for good**



Quit smoking today with our help

For tips, tools and support:



Sign up to
the quit plan at
QUIT.ie



Freephone
1800 201 203



Free text
QUIT
to 50100

QUIT.ie



Facebook.com/HSEquit



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instagram.com/hse_quit