

How QuitCoach works

Quitting is a process, not a single event. There are different stages of quitting and becoming a nonsmoker. By asking questions about your smoking, QuitCoach finds out what stage you are at. The advice QuitCoach gives will help you to move to the next stage and beyond.

Think of QuitCoach as a 'life coach' guiding you through the process of quitting. As you progress, we recommend you return to QuitCoach for new advice to help you with the next set of challenges you face. When you return, the assessment will be much shorter than the first time, as we only ask about things that have changed or are likely to change. Ideally you will return 3-6 times over the course of a successful attempt, with 2-4 visits after you have actually quit.

QuitCoach guides you through the four main challenges in quitting smoking.

1. Making the decision to quit.
2. Setting a date and actually stopping.

And, after you quit:

3. Dealing with urges to smoke and nicotine withdrawal.
4. Dealing with situations where you used to smoke and starting to think and feel like a nonsmoker.

The questions QuitCoach asks are relevant to your current situation, so as you progress it asks some different questions, to make the new advice more relevant to where you are currently at. Your advice also provides feedback on any progress you have made. It can help to keep you on track.

Most people try to quit a number of times before they quit for good. QuitCoach can also help you learn from your difficulties and setbacks.

QUITCOACH HELPS YOU TO PREPARE TO QUIT

Quitting can be hard work. Make it easier by being prepared. QuitCoach gives you the information you need to be prepared.

You are ready to quit when you:

- understand your addiction
- know what to expect after you quit
- have strategies to help you resist urges to smoke, and
- know what tools are available to help you.

MAKE A DECISION

Don't expect to be sure that you can quit. You are likely to have doubts. You don't need to be confident of success to have a go. Remember, you can't quit successfully if you don't try.

PRACTICE QUITTING

If you haven't tried to quit before, or can't remember how it was last time, it may help if you try not to smoke in your favourite smoking situation and see how it feels. Think about ways to cope in that situation without smoking.

Practicing will build skills to help you avoid and resist temptations. Tough situations will be easier to handle if you have already practiced them.

FIND THE RIGHT TOOLS

Any task is easier if you use the best tools and use them properly. Quitting smoking is no different.

There are two types of tools to consider.

1. Structured programs such as QuitCoach.
2. Nicotine replacement products or quitting medication, which can help if you are addicted to nicotine.

QuitCoach helps you to organise your quit attempt. It helps you develop skills and advises you on when to use them. Other tools that provide structure include telephone-based callback services and face to face programs such as quit courses. You can also ask family and friends to support you to keep your motivation high.

QuitCoach also provides you with advice on when you might also benefit from using stop smoking medications.

QUITCOACH HELPS YOU STAY STOPPED FOREVER

QuitCoach provides you with advice and strategies for overcoming temptations to smoke. This is the biggest challenge in the days after you stop smoking as your body is craving nicotine. Having effective strategies makes staying quit easier.

Most other approaches to quitting only focus on resisting temptations to smoke. This is only part of the challenge.

Many people go back to smoking even after they appear to have beaten the temptations to smoke. Learning to deal with these is sometimes not enough. You can learn to feel and act like a nonsmoker. You are likely to still get the occasional urge to smoke, but you will get to the point where you can easily say “No, that isn’t me anymore” focus on other things, and the urge will disappear.

QuitCoach helps you with two important tasks on your way to enjoying being a nonsmoker.

1. FINDING NEW WAYS TO LIVE

Your smoking has been part of the way you live. Some parts of your life will have become closely linked with smoking, and you need to learn how to live these parts of your life without smoking.

2. BELIEVING THAT SMOKING HAS NO REAL BENEFITS FOR YOU

Most ex-smokers say that there is nothing much smoking can give you that you can’t get in other ways. Smoking does not really help you with problems such as stress, although it often seems to. In reality, smoking can cause these problems, or at least make them worse. QuitCoach can help you realise that smoking has no real value in your life. It is true that many ex-smokers miss the act of smoking and the way it made them feel. You need to accept that not having these experiences again is a small price to pay – that it was part of a previous time of your life.

WHY QUITTING IS HARD

SMOKING IS A FALSE FRIEND

Nicotine addiction can cause you to experience peaks and troughs in the way you feel. When you smoke a cigarette, you may feel a bit better for a short time, and it's natural to think that it was smoking that made you feel better. However, it's often the case that you felt bad because you needed nicotine - the addictive drug in cigarettes. So it is not surprising that a cigarette makes you feel better. However, an hour or so after smoking you will be feeling bad again, and needing another cigarette.

Nonsmokers do not have the highs and lows that nicotine causes. Their moods don't change as much. Most ex-smokers report feeling better more of the time since they quit.

YOUR BODY GETS READY FOR SMOKING SITUATIONS

Places, times or things you do have a strong link to your smoking. Your body learns to get ready in these situations for the arrival of nicotine, and you feel this as a craving to smoke.

If you resist the temptation to smoke, your body will slowly balance itself. In time, your body will stop reacting to the situation. This is why it is important that after you quit, you practice being in situations where you used to smoke until you no longer get cravings.

ADDICTION TAKES OVER PART OF YOUR BRAIN

Think of your addiction to smoking as a living thing. Imagine that your addiction lives in part of your mind. So, when thoughts and feelings about smoking come into your mind, you don't know if it is your addiction speaking or your real self.

As you try to kill your addiction off, it will fight for survival. You experience this as cravings and a desire to smoke. If you set your mind to ignore these cravings, and cut off these thoughts when they creep in, quitting will be less difficult.

The voice of addiction will try to persuade you to reconsider your decision to quit. Don't listen and don't be swayed. You know you have made the right decision. There is only one way to go and that's forward.

QUITTING IS NOT A SACRIFICE

Think of quitting as learning a new set of life skills and moving forward.

If you think of quitting as making a sacrifice, you will find it harder to resist tough situations.

You are not making a sacrifice, because you will be far better off in nearly every way. You are unlearning a way of life that is bad for your health. You are learning to live life as a nonsmoker.

Remember, you can't have the momentary pleasure of smoking without all the bad consequences coming with it. You can continue to enjoy life without these experiences and you will be better off overall.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT QUITCOACH

Q. DOES QUITCOACH REALLY WORK?

A. We have conducted scientific studies in which we demonstrated that this program actually helped smokers to quit, and to stay quit. This is not surprising because it is based on strategies that have been shown to help.

To be most effective it needs to be used several times. We cannot guarantee that you will succeed; only that using the program will increase your chances of successfully quitting.

Sometimes quit attempts go off the rails because of unexpected things happening. No program can protect you fully from them, but if you apply what you learn in the program to your life, you will be more likely to be able to overcome even the strongest temptations to smoke, and be better able to enjoy life as a nonsmoker.

Q. DO I REALLY NEED TO ANSWER ALL THESE QUESTIONS?

A. Yes, the questions are used to create advice that is relevant to you. The more QuitCoach knows, the more that advice can be tailored to fit your situation. There are more questions the first time you do an assessment. The second time you do the assessment, it is much shorter, as it only asks about things that are likely to have changed and are still relevant.

Q. CAN YOU USE NICOTINE REPLACEMENT PRODUCTS OR QUITTING MEDICATION AS WELL?

A. Yes. If we think you would benefit from using nicotine replacement therapy or prescription medications such as Champix, we will let you know in your advice. These products are particularly useful for smokers who are more physiologically addicted. If you are currently using one of these products and it is helping you, then you definitely should keep using it. Nicotine replacement products and quitting medications are an additional aid, they do not work by themselves. You need to use the other strategies suggested by this program as well. Research has shown that nicotine replacement products or quitting medications paired with structured advice programs like QuitCoach help smokers to quit.

Q. CAN YOU USE OTHER HELP AT THE SAME TIME?

A. Yes. In some ways the more help you get the better. However, if you are getting help from a person, discuss this program with them, and if you can, show them the advice you have received. This will minimise the risk of getting conflicting advice. Some smoking advisors find that bringing along the printed QuitCoach advice actually helps both them and you to better plan your quit program.

Q. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROGRAM?

A. Quit Coach has been developed by Prof Ron Borland and Dr James Balmford in conjunction with a team of experts in smoking cessation and in the use of the internet to communicate information. Prof Borland is an internationally recognised authority on smoking cessation. The development and testing of the program was funded by grants from the National Health and Medical Research Council, and from internal funding from the Quit Campaign and The Cancer Council Victoria. This version of the program is brought to you by Quit Victoria. Copyright rests with The Cancer Council Victoria.

Q. WHAT IF SOME OF THE ADVICE I GET SEEMS WRONG?

A. This can happen. Everybody is different, and QuitCoach is basing your advice on similarities you share with other smokers and ex-smokers. Sometimes it assumes things about people that are wrong. We apologise if this happens to you.

If, on reflection, part of the advice doesn't seem right for you, then ignore this section. However, it is most important that you don't use finding inappropriate advice as an excuse not to press on. The rest of the advice is still likely to be useful. Don't let anything come between you and your goal of becoming a nonsmoker.

We would be most appreciative if you email us (problems@quitcoach.org.au) about a problem you identify, so that we can try to fix it.

Q. IS IT CONFIDENTIAL?

A. Yes, the program is as confidential as we can possibly make it. All of your information is stored in a secure database which only authorized people can access. And, if some unauthorized person did, the information they found wouldn't make much sense without knowing what a whole bunch of numbers meant (that's how we record your answers). The only time someone would access your information would be if you email QuitCoach with a question about your registration or the advice you have received. In this case, a technician may need to refer to your information in order to solve the problem quickly. You can rest assured that anything our staff learn about you as a result of the program is kept strictly confidential. The statistics we collect on use of the program are all put together without using identifying information.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM

QuitCoach is a complex computer program. The computer software behind QuitCoach was developed by QuestMetrics Pty Ltd. It is built off their Quest Survey questionnaire tool. Contact Cancer Council Victoria or QuestMetrics for more information: info@quitcoach.org.au.