

Strategies for stopping

These notes are designed to help you follow through on your decision to quit smoking. There are three ways you can go about it: quitting abruptly, continual postponement (taking it a cigarette at a time), or gradually cutting down (reducing the number of cigarettes you smoke per day over a period of time). For most people quitting abruptly is the preferred method, but some people have a strong preference for another approach. If you don't have a preference, we recommend quitting abruptly. Each of these methods can be used with or without the help of stop-smoking medication (see the Stop Smoking Medications Advice Sheet). All the strategies suggested here can be used both with and without the help of stop-smoking medications.

QUITTING ABRUPTLY

This strategy is sometimes called going “cold turkey”, especially if you don't use any medication. It involves setting your quit date and committing yourself to not smoking at all, once you get there. If the idea of never smoking again is too threatening, then we suggest you consider setting a shorter term goal to focus your efforts on (see the Getting through the Early Days Advice Sheet for advice on how to do this). Research shows that most people use some version of the quitting abruptly method, and that it is generally better than cutting down. It is the strategy that we recommend.

CONTINUAL POSTPONEMENT

If you find it really hard to think about quitting, then this strategy may work for you. This is the ultimate in setting short-term goals. Essentially, this strategy involves never having your next cigarette. You can do this quietly with no big announcements and no

clean-outs. Indeed, you can even keep a pack of cigarettes with you (but only if you are sure you won't light up without thinking). Each time you feel like smoking you simply decide to put it off for a while, or have a nicotine replacement product such as gum instead. Your focus needs to stay on the moment. Don't think about the future or when you will next smoke - that is irrelevant. If you do, it tends to undermine this strategy and reduce your chances of success. Some smokers like to tell themselves they'll only smoke if they need it more than anything else in the world, others that the most important thing is to delay, and as the urges get less, then there is no need to smoke. It is important to stick with this strategy. If you think about changing it, you should only do so when you are not craving a cigarette and after reviewing your reasons for quitting.

Set yourself a date to start, but focus on it being the start of trying to delay. If you can keep postponing smoking each time you are tempted, then you will find that after a while you simply forget to put the pack in your pocket, and gradually you will come to think about smoking less and less.

The postponement strategy may be for you if you really feel that you are making a sacrifice by quitting, and you are likely to keep thinking about what you are depriving yourself of. It is unlikely to be a good choice if you are someone who likes to spend lots of time planning for the future.

There is no research on how successful this approach is in general, but some people have used it successfully.

CUTTING DOWN

Gradually cutting down can be a good way to discover situations in which you rely on smoking, and to work out which situations you don't really have to smoke in. In this way you can gain some control over your addiction. However, cutting down is generally not as successful as quitting abruptly, so **we do not recommend it**. However, if you do decide you want to use this strategy, there are a number of ways you can go about it:

1. Gradually have your first cigarette later in the day. For example, smoke your first cigarette one hour later each day. You may decide to first smoke at 9.00, then the next day at 10.00, and so on. Of course, if there are periods in the day when you can't smoke (such as during work), you can increase the delay time more quickly. You should stop altogether when you get to within two hours of your normal bed time.
2. Limit yourself to a certain number of cigarettes per day. For example, if you normally smoke 20 a day, put 15 cigarettes in your pack at the start of the day and limit yourself to these. Once you have smoked them, then that's it for the day. Decrease the number of cigarettes you smoke per day by at least 5 per day until you get below 10, then at least 2 per day, until you finally get to zero.
3. There are more complicated ways which involve only smoking at specified times. Generally these are done with a pre-programmed machine (e.g., a mobile phone) that beeps at you when you can smoke, and you can only smoke within a minute of a beep going off. Some programs of this sort are available, and can be quite effective. You will probably need to find one if you choose this method, as it is difficult to do this by yourself.

Note: Whichever cutting down method you choose, you should get rid of your favourite cigarette in the first few days. Moreover, you should get to zero (quit) within two weeks of starting. Set a date that you won't smoke beyond at least three days in advance (better still, set it before you start). When you do so, write down the schedule you have set for each day till you finally stop. Every evening check to see that you have done what you said you would, and remind yourself of the task for the next day. Once you reach the quit date, let nothing get in the way of stopping completely.

THINGS TO DO REGARDLESS

To maximise your chances of success, doing the following before you quit can help (Note: some may not apply if you are using Continual Postponement):

1. **Get your resources organised.** Before you quit, consider the resources you have available. This includes getting stop smoking medication if you decide to use it. Where practical, tell your friends and family about your quit date and seek their support. If you work outside of home, you could also tell your work colleagues and supervisors and ask for their help, especially over the first week or two. However, if you don't think you will get any help, let that be a source of extra motivation, not an excuse to put it off.
2. **Remove temptations.** The night before you quit, we recommend you get rid of all your cigarettes, lighters and ashtrays, and anything else that reminds you of smoking. Try to replace these with things that may help you to not smoke. For example, flowers, a bowl of low-fat nibbles, or perhaps some "No Smoking" signs. Include things you enjoy, don't just rely on signs not to smoke.

3. Prepare yourself mentally. In the hours before you quit smoking, focus your mind on the task. Remind yourself that you have decided to stop smoking and nothing is going to get in the way. Remind yourself that any doubts you have are your addiction speaking, and resolve not to give in. Your addiction is your enemy. Be single minded about staying quit.

4. Make a rule: “What I will do if I want to review my decision”. This might sound like thinking about giving up before you have started, but it is not. We know most quit attempts end with the person going back to smoking. A common reason is that the decision to resume is made when craving a cigarette. We recommend you use the following two step rule:

- a.** Only consider giving up on your quit attempt when you are not craving a cigarette and you have your list of reasons for quitting in front of you. If you decide you can't continue with this quit attempt, then;
- b.** Delay implementing the decision to the next morning or the end of any short term goal you have set. Then review your decision to be sure you are prepared to give up all that you have gained so far.

You can expect to be able to follow through on such a commitment. Committing for the rest of your life to something is far harder to maintain in the face of pressure to change.

In summary, prepare yourself, have a plan for dealing with temptations (see Problem Planner), commit yourself to achieving any short-term goal regardless of how hard you find it (see Getting through the Early Days), and commit yourself to renewing the goal unless in the cold light of day, when not craving a cigarette, you decide it is not worthwhile.

Once you have stopped, you need to make sure you have all the strategies in place that you need to stay quit. Use the suggestions in your advice letter, plus there are extra tips in the Getting through the Early Days Advice Sheet. Use the Problem Planner to do this more systematically.