

The health benefits of quitting

No matter when you quit, you are likely to have health benefits. It is never too late to quit. You may have already done some damage to your body but don't put off quitting. The damage will continue to get worse if you keep smoking. Even people with cancer can improve their health by quitting.

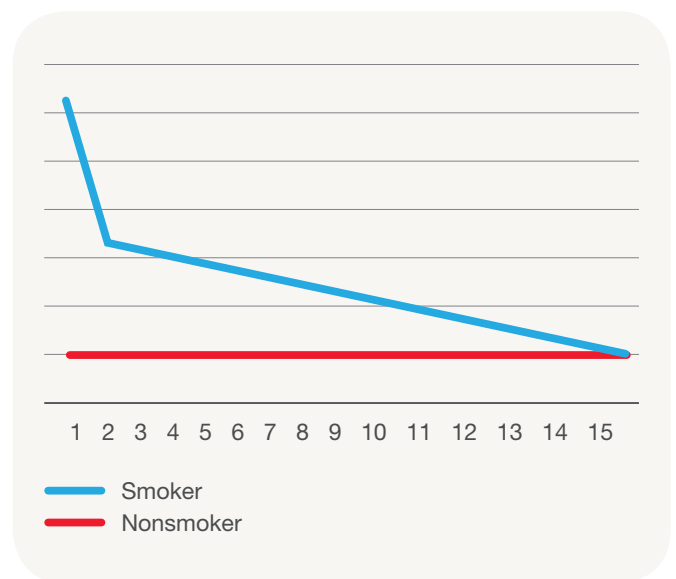
FIRST THE REALLY GOOD NEWS

As soon as you stop smoking, your body begins to repair itself. In the first days after quitting your body is already working better. You may not feel the improvements immediately. But then you didn't feel the damage that smoking was doing to you immediately either.

Your risk of a **heart attack** reduces rapidly. In the first year you will reduce the extra risk of a heart attack because of you smoking by half. In 15 years after quitting you will have almost the same risk of suffering a heart attack as a lifetime nonsmoker.

So if we were to try and indicate this on a graph it would look something like this. Your risk of having a heart attack as a smoker who has quit is shown by the blue line. You can see the 50% reduction in risk in the first year of being quit. Your risk gradually reduces until after 15 years your risk would be the same as a nonsmoker. Remember that this is a simple diagram and isn't supposed to try and show every individual's level of risk.

It might be an idea to keep this graph somewhere so that you can remind yourself of one of the benefits of quitting.



Your risk of **stroke** and **peripheral vascular disease** also goes down. Your ability to recover from illness and your general level of **fitness** will begin to improve a week or two after quitting.

NOW THE NOT SO GOOD NEWS

After you quit, your risk of getting smoking-related **cancer** may gradually drop a little. But it will never return to the level of a lifetime nonsmoker (unless you quit within around 10 years of starting).

Any damage you have done to your **lungs** is likely to be permanent, although your lungs will be able to work a bit better as they clean out. Once you quit you should have slightly less trouble with shortness of breath.

But the good news is that your risk of these conditions won't continue to increase as it would if you kept smoking. If you don't quit:

- most lifelong smokers die from their smoking – often 20 years younger than nonsmokers
- nearly all the rest have health problems that make life harder.

WHEN WILL YOU FEEL BETTER?

We provide a rough guide below, but everyone is different, and the rate of improvement also varies. If you're lucky, you'll start feeling better within a few days. However, for the first couple of weeks after quitting, you might actually feel a bit worse, at least in some ways.

It is common to cough up some black gunk. This is your body recovering and getting rid of some of the tar it has been unable to get rid of while you were smoking. After this is over, most smokers feel that they have more energy and generally begin to feel better.

Don't expect a miraculous transformation. If you have already done irreversible damage, there is only so much recovery you can expect. Along with improved energy, your senses of taste and smell also recover. This can increase your enjoyment of food. Be careful not to eat more and put on weight!

Because our health has its ups and downs, and some of the improvement takes months, it can sometimes be hard to see the difference. If you want to show yourself that you're becoming fitter, try exercising till you are puffed and repeating it every week or so after you quit. You're likely to surprise yourself at how much more you're able to do each time over the first month after you stop. Note: Do not try this if you have emphysema or heart disease.

The earlier you quit, the better for your health. The benefits of stopping smoking apply to men and women, young and old, and people with and without smoking-related diseases. So it is worth having a go.

Depending on the number of cigarettes you smoke, typical benefits of stopping are:

WITHIN A DAY

Almost all of the nicotine is out of your bloodstream.

The level of carbon monoxide in your blood has dropped and more oxygen can reach your heart and muscles.

WITHIN A WEEK

Your lung's natural cleaning system will start to recover and become better at removing mucus, tar and dust from your lungs.

You will have higher blood levels of protective antioxidants such as Vitamin C.

WITHIN TWO MONTHS

Your lungs will no longer be producing extra phlegm caused by smoking.

You'll cough and wheeze less.

Your immune system will have begun to recover.

Your blood is less thick and sticky, and blood flow to your hands and feet improves.

Your body is better at healing cuts and wounds.

WITHIN SIX MONTHS

Your lungs are working better. Exercising will be easier, as more air is getting into your lungs.

Note: This benefit will be less if you have damaged your lungs permanently.

AFTER ONE YEAR

Your blood pressure returns to normal.

There is a 50% reduction in your risk of heart attack

WITHIN TWO TO FIVE YEARS

There is a large drop in your risk of stroke.

Your risk then continues to gradually decrease.

For women, within 5 years your risk of cervical cancer is the same as someone who has never smoked.

AFTER TEN YEARS

Your risk of lung cancer is much lower than that of a continuing smoker and continues to decline (provided the disease is not already present).

AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS

Your risk of heart attack and stroke is close to that of a person who has never smoked.