

The Benefits of Stopping Smoking

Stopping smoking can make a big difference to your health and lifestyle. It is never too late to stop smoking to greatly benefit your health. For example, if you stop smoking in middle age, before having cancer or some other serious disease, you avoid most of the increased risk of death due to smoking. Help is available if you find it difficult to stop smoking.

What are the health benefits of stopping smoking?

The benefits begin straight away.

You reduce your risk of getting serious disease no matter what age you give up. However, the sooner you stop, the greater the reduction in your risk. In fact, researchers have found that if you stop smoking before the age of 50 your risk of dying is virtually reduced that that of a non-smoker. Even if you give up after the age of 60, your risk of dying at any given age is reduced by about 39% compared to a person who carries on smoking.

- If you stop smoking you:
 - Reduce the risk of getting serious smoking-related diseases such as heart disease, cancers, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and peripheral vascular disease.
 - Reduce the risk of getting various other conditions which, although not life-threatening, can cause unpleasant problems. For example: impotence (erection problems), fertility problems, optic neuropathy (a condition affecting the nerve supplying the eye), cataracts, macular degeneration (a breakdown of tissue at the back of the eye), psoriasis, gum disease, tooth loss, osteoporosis and Raynaud's phenomenon (fingers going white or blue when exposed to cold).
 - Reduce the risk of pregnancy complications if you are pregnant.
- If you have smoked since being a teenager or young adult:
 - If you stop smoking before the age of about 35, your life expectancy is only slightly less than it is for people who have never smoked.
 - If you stop smoking before the age of 50, you decrease the risk of dying from smoking-related diseases by 50%.
- But it is never too late to stop smoking to gain health benefits. Even if you already have COPD or heart disease, your outlook (prognosis) is much improved if you stop smoking.

Timeline of health benefits after stopping smoking ...

After ...	Health Benefit ...
72 hours	Breathing becomes easier. Bronchial tubes begin to relax and energy levels increase.
1 month	Skin appearance improves, owing to improved skin perfusion.
3-9 months	Cough, wheezing, and breathing problems improve and lung function increases by up to 10%.
1 year	Risk of a heart attack falls to about half that of a smoker.
10 years	Risk of lung cancer falls to about half that of a smoker.
15 years	Risk of heart attack falls to the same level that it would be for someone who has never smoked.

Other benefits of stopping smoking

These include:

- Your breath won't smell any more of stale tobacco.
- The smell of stale tobacco will also go from your clothes, hair, and home.
- Foods and drinks taste and smell much better.
- Finances improve. You will save well over £2,000 per year if you smoked 20 a day.
- Better rates of insurance policies.
- You are likely to feel good about yourself.

How can I stop smoking?

About 2 in 3 smokers want to stop smoking. Some people can give up easily. Willpower and determination are the most important aspects when giving up smoking. However, nicotine is a drug of addiction and many people find giving up a struggle. Help is available.

- GPs, practice nurses, or pharmacists can provide information, encouragement, and tips on stopping smoking. Also, throughout the country there are specialist NHS 'Stop Smoking Clinics' which have a good success in helping people to stop smoking. Your doctor may refer you to one if you are keen to stop smoking.
- Various medicines can increase your chance of quitting. These include nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) which comes as gums, sprays, patches, tablets, lozenges, and inhalers. You can buy NRT without a prescription. Also, medicines called bupropion (trade name 'Zyban®') and varenicline (trade name 'Champix®') can help. These are available on prescription. See separate leaflets called '*Smoking - Nicotine Replacement Therapy*', '*Smoking - Helping to Stop with Bupropion*' and '*Smoking - Helping to Stop with Varenicline*'.

Further help and information

Quit - a charity that helps people to stop smoking

Quitline: 0800 00 22 00 Web: www.quit.org.uk

Smokefree - information from the NHS

Free smoking helpline 0800 022 4 332 Web: www.smokefree.nhs.uk

For help and advice on stopping smoking, and for details of your local NHS Stop Smoking Service.

Further reading & references

- [Brief interventions and referral for smoking cessation](#), NICE (2006)
- [Various factsheets and guidelines on smoking and smoking cessation](#), Action on Smoking and Health (various dates)
- [Smoking Cessation Services](#); NICE Public Health Guidance (Feb 2008)
- Anekwe L; It's never too late to quit smoking, Best Health BMJ, 2011.
- Bullen C; Impact of tobacco smoking and smoking cessation on cardiovascular risk and Expert Rev Cardiovasc Ther. 2008 Jul;6(6):883-95.

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