

# You Can Control Your Weight as You Quit Smoking



U.S. DEPARTMENT  
OF HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES

**WIN** *Weight-control Information Network*

Many people gain weight when they quit smoking. Even so, the best action you can take to improve your health is to quit smoking. Focus on stopping smoking first. Then you can continue to improve your health in other ways. These may include reaching and staying at a healthy weight for life.

## Will I gain weight if I stop smoking?

Not everyone gains weight when they stop smoking. Among people who do, the average weight gain is between 6 and 8 pounds. Roughly 10 percent of people who stop smoking gain a large amount of weight—30 pounds or more.

## What causes weight gain after quitting?

When smokers quit, they may gain weight for a number of reasons. These include:

- Feeling hungry. Quitting smoking may make a person feel hungrier than usual. This feeling usually goes away after several weeks.
- Having more snacks and alcoholic drinks. Some people eat more high-fat, high-sugar snacks and drink more alcoholic beverages after they quit smoking.
- Burning calories at normal rate again. Smoking cigarettes makes the body burn calories faster. After quitting smoking, the body's normal rate of burning calories returns. When calories are burned more slowly again, weight gain may take place.

## Can I avoid weight gain?

To help yourself gain only a small amount or no weight when you stop smoking, try to:

**Do you want to  
stop smoking?  
Are you worried  
about gaining  
weight? If so,  
this information  
may help you.**



## Handout #3B

### Accept yourself

### Get regular moderate-intensity physical activity

### Limit snacking and alcohol

### Consider using medication to help you quit.

## Accept yourself

Do not worry about gaining a few pounds. Instead, feel proud that you are helping your health by quitting smoking. Stopping smoking may make you feel better about yourself in many ways.

### Stopping smoking may help you have:

- more energy
- whiter teeth
- fresher breath and fresher smelling clothes and hair
- fewer wrinkles and healthier-looking skin
- a clearer voice.

## Get regular moderate-intensity physical activity

Regular physical activity may help you avoid large weight gains when you quit smoking. It may help you look and feel good, and fit into your clothes better. You will likely find that you can breathe easier during physical activity after you quit smoking.

Try to get 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days of the week, preferably every day. The ideas below may help you to be active every day.

### Ideas for being active every day

- Take a walk after dinner.
- Sign-up for a class such as dance or yoga. Ask a friend to join you.

- Get off the bus one stop early if you are in an area safe for walking.
- Park the car farther away from entrances to stores, movie theatres, or your home.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Make sure the stairs are well lit.

## Limit snacking and alcohol

Having more high-fat, high-sugar snacks and alcoholic drinks may lead to large weight gains when you quit smoking. The ideas below may help you make healthy eating and drinking choices as you quit smoking.

### Healthy eating and drinking choices as you quit smoking

- Do not go too long without eating. Being very hungry can lead to less healthy food choices.
- Eat enough at meal times to satisfy you.
- Choose healthy snacks, such as fresh fruit or canned fruit packed in juice (not syrup), air-popped popcorn, or fat-free yogurt, when you are hungry between meals.
- Do not deny yourself an occasional "treat." If you crave ice cream, enjoy a small cone.
- Choose an herbal tea, hot cocoa made with nonfat milk, or sparkling water instead of an alcoholic beverage.

## Consider using medication to help you quit

Talk to your health care provider about medications that may help you quit smoking. Some people gain less weight when they use a medication to help them stop smoking.

## Handout #3B

### Medications that may help you quit smoking

- Nicotine replacement therapy
  - patch
  - gum
  - nasal spray
  - inhaler
- Antidepressant medication

The patch and gum are available without a prescription from your health care provider.

### Will weight gain hurt my health?

A small—or even large—weight gain will not hurt your health as much as continuing to smoke will. The health risks of smoking are dramatic.

### Health risks of smoking

- Death—tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. It kills more than 400,000 people in the U.S. each year.
- Cancer—smoking greatly increases the risk for lung cancer, the leading cause of cancer death in the U.S. Smoking is also linked to cancer of the esophagus, larynx, kidney, pancreas, and cervix.
- Other health problems—smoking increases the risk for lung disease and heart disease. In pregnant women, smoking is linked to premature birth and low birth weight babies.

By quitting smoking, you are taking a big step to improve your health. Instead of worrying about weight gain, focus on quitting. Once you are tobacco-free, you can work toward having a healthy weight for life by becoming more physically active and choosing healthier foods.

These brochures from the Weight-control Information Network (WIN) can help you adopt healthy eating and physical activity habits:

*Energize Yourself & Your Family*

*Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan: Better Health and You*

*Just Enough for You: About Food Portions*

*Walking...A Step in the Right Direction*

### For more information on quitting smoking, contact:

**American Cancer Society**

<http://www.cancer.org>

1-800-ACS-2345 1-800-227-2345

**American Heart Association**

<http://www.americanheart.org>

1-800-AHA-USA1 1-800-242-8721

**American Lung Association**

<http://www.lungusa.org/>

212-315-8700

**National Cancer Institute**

<http://www.nci.nih.gov>

1-800-4-CANCER 1-800-422-6237

1-800-332-8615 (TTY)

**National Institute on Drug Abuse**

<http://www.nida.nih.gov>

301-443-1124

**Office of the Surgeon General**

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco>