



The facts about smoking and weight gain

Many people put off quitting smoking because of concerns about weight gain.¹ This fact sheet explains how smoking affects weight, describes the benefits of stopping smoking, and provides tips you can use to manage weight gain while quitting.

Concerns about weight gain

You are not alone: many people worry about gaining weight when they quit smoking.¹ But don't let weight gain be a barrier to quitting. People vary in how much weight they gain after quitting smoking. Research shows most smokers will gain weight after quitting in the first 3 months, but this rate of weight gain then reduces. At 12 months after quitting, 16–21% of quitters had lost weight.² Also, smokers and ex-smokers put on weight in different places. Recent ex-smokers gain less fat around their stomach (a risk factor for cardiovascular disease) than those who continue to smoke.³

How smoking affects your weight

When you smoke, the drug nicotine speeds up your metabolism: which means your body uses energy more quickly. When you quit smoking, your metabolic rate decreases and many people increase their eating and, in particular, the intake of high-calorie foods and alcohol.¹ This contributes to weight gain.

Benefits of quitting

Quitting smoking has immediate as well as long-term health benefits for women of all ages. Smoking causes short- and long-term changes to women's bodies, leading to earlier menopause and the development of bone diseases such as osteoporosis. Quitting smoking reverses these changes and slows the progression of disease – and can potentially undo the damage caused by smoking. Many people may not know that the health benefits of quitting smoking start within minutes of smoking the last cigarette – and continue to accumulate for many years.

The health benefits of smoking cessation far outweigh the health risk from extra body weight³, and if you are already overweight, smoking is increasing your risk of suffering from a range of other serious health problems.¹ As well, quitting smoking improves fitness levels, and you will notice other changes with your appearance, such as healthier-looking skin and hair, whiter teeth and fewer wrinkles.⁴ Over time, former smokers have an average waist-to-hip ratio and an average body mass index (BMI) similar to or approaching that of people who have never smoked.³

Not only is your health immediately improved by quitting smoking, the health benefits accumulate for many years.

Need help to quit?

- ▶ Talk to your doctor about the most suitable options for you to help you quit.
- ▶ Call the **Quitline (13 7848, 13 QUIT)** – a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week telephone service that offers free assistance to smokers and former smokers wishing to speak to a trained health professional about quitting or staying quit.
- ▶ Visit the **iCanQuit** website: www.icanquit.com.au – this is an interactive quit tool that lets smokers share their stories about previous, current or planned quit attempts with others. It provides helpful hints on how to quit, as well as a goal tracker and savings calculator so that smokers can see how much money is saved by quitting.

What you can do to manage weight gain

It is important to focus on quitting smoking before you think about weight control – but there are a few things that you can do to help manage your weight:

- ▶ Be aware of times when you crave a cigarette or food, and have sugar-free chewing gum or shelled nuts nearby. This will help to keep your hands busy, and chewing helps you to not eat as much.
- ▶ Quitting smoking can free up \$60 a week or more. This money can be used to buy tasty and healthy food.
- ▶ Reduce alcohol intake.
- ▶ Quitting is also a good time to think about getting more physically active, as doing exercise not only helps with your weight but also helps with nicotine withdrawal symptoms. This can be as simple as going for regular walks (such as at lunchtime), taking stairs instead of a lift, and parking your car further away from entrances to shops or work. If you have children, join them in walking to a park.
- ▶ Using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) or other smoking cessation medications available from your doctor can assist in managing nicotine withdrawal symptoms, and can also delay weight gain.

Weight gain may occur when you quit smoking, but your strength in quitting means that you have taken control of your life. Don't let fear of temporary weight gain stop you from quitting!

Reference

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