

Smoking, Secondhand Smoke, and Heart Health

In the United States, someone has a heart attack every 40 seconds. Each minute, more than one person dies from a heart-disease-related event.

Smoking is a major cause of diseases of the heart and blood vessels and causes one of every three deaths from cardiovascular disease. Smoking can:

- Makes blood sticky and more likely to clot, which can block blood flow to the heart and brain
- Increases the buildup of plaque (fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances) in blood vessels
- Raises triglycerides, a type of fat in your blood
- Lowers “good” cholesterol (HDL)

Women who smoke and are on birth control pills may have an increased risk of stroke.

Secondhand smoke can even affect the cardiovascular system. Even if you are a nonsmoker who is exposed to second-hand smoke on a regular basis, your body will absorb nicotine and other harmful substances.

Exposure time to secondhand smoke and its effects:

- 5 minutes: stiffens the aorta as much as smoking a cigarette
- 20–30 minutes: causes excess blood clotting and increases the buildup of fat deposits in blood vessels, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke
- 2 hours: increases the chance of irregular heart beat and can trigger a heart attack

The longer you are around secondhand smoke, the greater the level of harmful substances in your body. As a result, you might have an increased risk of developing smoking-related disorders, including lung cancer, heart disease, eye, sinus and respiratory infections

Certain people are extremely susceptible to the harmful effects of secondhand smoke, including: These include pregnant women, anyone who lives with a smoker, bartenders and restaurant servers.

Quitting smoking can help. You can improve your heart health and save money by cutting down and learning how to quit. At \$8 a pack, a pack-a-day smoker will save about \$240 a month.

The health benefits of quitting smoking includes:

- Your blood pressure and heart rate start to decrease 20 minutes after your last cigarette.
- Your risk of heart attack decreases in 24 hours.
- One year after quitting, the risk of heart disease declines to half that of a smoker.
- After 5 years, your stroke risk may be reduced to that of someone who never smoked.
- After 15 years, your risk of heart disease is similar to that of someone who never smoked.
- After quitting, your blood becomes thinner, less sticky, and less likely to form clots. Your heart has less work to do because it will be able to move the blood through your body more easily.

- Quitting will not get rid of fatty deposits already there, but it will slow the buildup of new fatty deposits in your arteries.

Using tobacco is a physical addiction to nicotine and a habit. Quitting tobacco means learning what helped you stay quit, even for a day, and learning new habits in place of smoking or using e-cigarettes.

Nicotine replacement products: the patch, gum, lozenges, or prescription medications help reduce withdrawal symptoms. They work best when you also learn skills to quit and practice new habits in a “How to Quit” program.

How to get ready to quit smoking:

- Choose only to smoke or vape outside your home and car until you quit.
- Ask all who smoke or vape to step outside. The toxins stay in your home, and you inhale them even when you are not smoking. Toxins are pulled into the car’s air and heating system, then get recirculated, even when no one is smoking.
- Choose to store your cigarettes out of sight, in an out-of-the-way place.
- Choose not to take tobacco with you on short errands. Keep a bottle of water, a straw, gum, or lozenges on hand.
- Gather information about “How to Quit” programs to have when you are ready to quit.

Quitting takes practice.

When you have the urge for a cigarette, often it will pass if you choose to:

- **Delay** using tobacco at least 5 minutes
- **Drink** water (not coffee, tea, or soda)
- **Deep breathe** five times, in through the nose, out through the mouth
- **Do** something else: go for a walk, read to your child, clean a drawer. *Just do something!*

Quitting means learning a new lifestyle.

Get prepared. Make a list of things to do instead of using tobacco:

- As a reward when you finish a task
- When you are bored
- To relax when you are stressed
- After eating
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Give yourself credit for every cigarette you avoid!

If you are doing many of these tips, you are ready for a “How to Quit” program. Visit the Centers for Disease Control's [Quit Smoking website](#) or contact the [yesquit.org](#) or 1-800-QuitNow.

Sources

- American Heart Association. “[Smoking and Cardiovascular Disease \(Heart Disease\)](#).”
- American Lung Association. “[Benefits of Quitting](#).”