

# Quit smoking and breathe easy about your health

By [Graham Anderson](#)

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31 May is World No-Tobacco Day. Although most smokers have tried to give up at some point, smoking is a particularly tricky habit to quit. Here's why you really should, and how.



There's a very good case to be made for giving up smoking – and the tips given here might help you give up smoking. (Image: S. Schmidt [Benutzer: lonestar84, eigenes Foto], via Wikimedia Commons)

Everyone knows that smoking is bad for you. Cigarette boxes proclaim it to smokers, and non-smokers have the law on their side when they demand the right to clean air. However, the dangers of smoking have had so much airtime that some smokers have become blinkered about the real harm that they are doing to their bodies every day.

## The damage

Smoking damages the lungs by destroying the alveoli or air sacks. These transfer the oxygen that you breathe into your blood and can never be replaced or repaired. Smoking also paralyses the cilia that sweep particles from your lungs, so you are less able to get rid of dust, pollen and harmful viruses or bacteria. As a result, the smoke builds up in the lungs in the form of tar. The harmful chemicals in cigarettes include nicotine, arsenic, methane, ammonia, hydrogen cyanide and butane - all of which you would avoid if they were printed as the ingredients on a food packet.

## Smoking, second hand

According to the Heart Foundation, there are seven million smokers in South Africa, 90% of whom began smoking before the age of 18, and an alarming 20% of whom started before the age of 10. Most of these smokers aren't smoking in isolation, and their second-hand smoke is having an effect on their loved ones and colleagues, all the time. Second-hand smoke has five times more carbon monoxide and six times more nicotine than actual smoking, because second-hand smokers don't have the benefit of a filter.

Second-hand smoking causes many of the same diseases as normal smoking, including cancer, long-term respiratory diseases and heart disease. Children who inhale second-hand smoke are more likely to contract bronchitis and pneumonia, worse asthma and middle ear infections.

Babies whose mothers smoked during pregnancy are more likely to be underweight, premature or stillborn. They also have a higher risk of sudden infant death syndrome, breathing problems and developing lung disease or diabetes. Similar risks exist for babies or mothers exposed to second-hand smoke. Breastfed babies are also exposed to all the harmful chemicals that their smoking mothers inhale.

## **Kicking the habit**

Smokers generally know that smoking is bad for you, and 80% have tried to give up at least once, but the socially acceptable nature of this addiction, as well as the belief that smoking calms you, helps you to concentrate or is some kind of a treat makes this a very difficult habit to kick. Nicotine is gone from the body within three days, but withdrawal symptoms can be felt for up to two weeks and some of the by-products can stick around for up to a month. However, it's the psychological addiction that's the hardest to fight.

Here are some of the best ways to quit:

## **Go on a course**

Courses like [Allen Carr's Easyway](#) to Stop Smoking method or [Smoke Enders](#) are effective for helping participants to kick the habit at the same time as addressing the psychological factors that contribute to the addiction. Both promise high success rates, although success rates usually fall after a couple of years as ex-smokers forget what they have learnt or fall victim to the conviction that they can manage "just one". Refresher courses are offered.

## **Get a prescription**

Prescription drugs, like Zyban, can help to reduce the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal. Studies showed that people using Zyban were less likely to feel irritable, frustrated, angry, anxious, distracted, restless or depressed than those on the placebo. These drugs are not without side effects, though, and should only be used under supervision by a doctor. The most common side effects include a dry mouth and difficulty sleeping.

## **Nicotine replacement**

Because nicotine is the addictive substance in smoking, it makes logical sense that it's easier to kick the habit if you're still getting your nicotine fix. People have some success with nicotine patches or nicotine gum, but it still takes willpower to quit the comforting sensation of holding a cigarette and inhaling smoke. Moreover, of course, once the cigarette habit is kicked, you still have to wean yourself off the nicotine patches.

Very few people would choose death or ill health over smoking if confronted with a direct decision. However, by continuing to light up, every day, this is exactly the choice that they are making. Smokers owe it to themselves and their loved ones to do whatever it takes to quit as soon as possible. Smoke your last cigarette ever on World No Tobacco Day.

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