

Getting through Nicotine (Tobacco) Withdrawal

Please note this factsheet is only a guide. If you are thinking about managing your tobacco use seek advice from your doctor to get support tailored to your needs.
Last Reviewed: 8th April, 2020

What is nicotine?

Nicotine is the addictive drug in tobacco products like cigarettes and rollies. Some e-liquids used in e-cigarettes and vape devices also contain nicotine.

What is a nicotine withdrawal?

Nicotine withdrawal is a group of symptoms that occur after stopping or decreasing the amount of nicotine you use. They are temporary physical and emotional changes you may experience, as your body recovers from smoking.

What to expect in withdrawal

Different people will experience nicotine withdrawal differently. Some people may find nicotine withdrawal more challenging than others. If you are finding nicotine withdrawal hard see your doctor, pharmacist or speak to *Quitline* to get support.

How long does withdrawal last?

Nicotine withdrawal symptoms start within the first 24-48 hours of stopping and are strongest in the first week. For most people, nicotine withdrawal symptoms disappear after 2-4 weeks.

What are the common nicotine withdrawal symptoms?

Common physical symptoms of nicotine withdrawal include:

- Increased appetite or weight gain
- Dizziness
- Sleep difficulties and sleep disturbance
- Upset stomach
- Constipation
- Coughing

Common emotional symptoms of nicotine withdrawal include:

- Urges to smoke or cravings
- Restlessness or feeling distracted
- Mood swings
- Agitation, irritability or anxiety
- Low mood

What are the benefits of quitting nicotine?

Quitting smoking or vaping has immediate and long-term health benefits. Within days your smell, taste and breathing will improve. Within 1-9 months any coughing, shortness of breath and stress you may experience while smoking will decrease. Over time, your risk of life-threatening health problems, including heart disease, stroke and cancer will also be much lower than if you keep smoking.

People with mental health problems have also found that their mental health and wellbeing improves after quitting smoking.

How can I manage my nicotine use?

Step 1: Decide to quit

Step 2: Get help – talk to a doctor or a pharmacist or call **QUIT (13 QUIT or 13 78 48)**. They can provide you support including medications that may help.

You can also register for **QuitCoach** and **QuitTxT** at www.quit.org.au to get a personalised quitting plan and regular reminders to keep on track.

Step 3: Get rid of any remaining nicotine products, lighters or ashtrays to reduce your chances of a lapse

What strategies can I use to manage my nicotine use?

- Stay positive and be kind to yourself while you are experiencing nicotine withdrawal
- Spend time with friends and family who support you
- Avoid situations where you used to use nicotine and begin new activities to replace smoking
- Set goals and rewards for using the money you save by managing your smoking
- Avoid caffeine-containing products like tea, coffee, chocolate and soft drinks. These can make your withdrawal worse.
- Good **nutrition**, **exercise** and **sleep** will help your body recover and help prevent weight gain.
- Sleep difficulties are common in withdrawal so follow these tips to help you sleep:
 - Try to go to bed around the same time each night, and set an alarm to wake at the same time each day
 - Go to sleep when you feel tired
 - If you do not fall asleep within 30 minutes of being in bed get back up and return to bed only when you are feeling tired
- Expect to have cravings to use nicotine; they are a difficult but normal part of withdrawal. Use the 4 D's approach anytime you experience cravings:
 - **Delay** acting on the urge to smoke or vape. The urge will pass after a few minutes on its own.
 - **Deep breathe**. Take long, slow breaths in and out. Repeat this three times.
 - **Do something else**. Take your mind off smoking or vaping by doing something else: put on some music, keep your hands busy, or go for a walk
 - **Drink water**. Sip water slowly to beat cravings for nicotine. You'll feel better both physically and mentally.
- Consider getting support for any stresses in your life. Stress can make your withdrawal worse than it actually is. Talk to your doctor or consider getting help from a counsellor.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about nicotine replacement products (e.g. nicotine patches, inhalers, sprays and lozenges). These can help reduce nicotine withdrawal symptoms and increase your chances of successfully quitting. Some are also cheaper if you get them with a prescription.
- Ask your doctor about anti-craving medications (e.g. *Champix*, *Zyban*) that may help you quit. Also make sure your doctor knows that you are quitting smoking as this may affect how your body responds to some other medications.
- Know that sometimes people undertake a number of quit attempts before succeeding. If you keep this in mind and keep going you will succeed.