

# Quitting smoking

## Why should I quit smoking?

There are many reasons to quit smoking. For many people, these include:

- Improve your health and lower your risk of smoking-caused illness, like heart and lung diseases, throat and oral cancer, and emphysema
- Improve your finances by saving the money that you spend on cigarettes
- Be a positive role model for friends and family
- Be more confident and in control of your own life
- Have an improved sense of taste and smell
- Heal faster and have fewer complications after surgery

In this HealthLinkBC file, smoking and tobacco use refers to the use of commercial tobacco products such as cigarettes. It does not refer to natural tobacco used for ceremonial or traditional purposes. We should not confuse traditional tobacco and its sacred uses with commercial tobacco and the addiction epidemic we see today.

## When is the best time to quit?

It is always a good time to quit. The health benefits of quitting smoking start the first day you quit, with increased oxygen in the blood and lower blood pressure. Within one year of quitting, your risk of having a smoking-related heart attack decreases by half. 10 years after quitting, your risk of lung cancer decreases by half. After 15 years smoke-free, your risk of a heart attack is the same as that of someone who never smoked.

## How can I get ready to quit?

Planning can help you succeed. Here are some

steps to take:

### 1. Get motivated

To help you stay motivated, make a list of the reasons you want to quit smoking. Keep the list handy as a reminder.

### 2. Pick your quit day

Pick the day you're going to quit. Try to pick a day that is no more than 2 weeks away so you do not lose your motivation. Set yourself up for success by choosing a stress-free quit day so there will be fewer things to tempt you away from your goals. Remember, there is no perfect time so pick your day to quit now.

### 3. Choose your quit methods

Choose the methods you want to use to help you quit smoking. Methods include Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT), prescription medications and counselling.

### 4. Build your support network

Quitting is easier when you have friends and family to support you. Surround yourself with positive people who want to see you succeed. Tell your friends and family about your goal and how they can best support you. They may talk you through a rough patch or give you a pep talk when you're struggling with a craving.

### 5. Plan for triggers

Certain situations, places or moods can "trigger" an urge to smoke. Think about what your triggers are and plan how you will cope with each one.

### 6. Manage withdrawal

When you quit smoking, your body has to adjust to being without nicotine. You will likely experience symptoms of nicotine withdrawal as this happens. Learn what to expect and how you can make it better. For example, irritability is a common withdrawal symptom. Relaxation

techniques such as mindfulness or deep breathing helps many people cope with this. NRT or prescription medications can also help you manage withdrawal symptoms.

## 7. Go easy on yourself

Quitting is a process and it's not always easy. You may slip up and have a cigarette, but that doesn't mean you've failed. Use the slip as an opportunity to learn what works for you and what does not, and keep trying.

### How can I quit smoking?

Quitting can be challenging, but there are many tools available to help you quit. Some people choose to quit cold turkey, without any aids, but you'll have a higher chance of success by using one or more of the methods below:

- NRT, such as the nicotine patch or gum
- Prescription medications that can help reduce cravings and symptoms of withdrawal
- Counselling and support, whether in-person, over the phone, or via text or chat

Different methods of quitting smoking work for different people. You may find that a combination of quitting methods work for you. The best chance for success is combining a form of quit aid, either NRT or medication, with coaching or counselling, and support.

Try not to think of quitting as an all or nothing occurrence. It's a gradual process that can take many attempts and different combinations of methods before you find one that works for you.

### How can medications help me stop smoking?

Medications can help reduce cravings for nicotine and make your withdrawal symptoms less intense.

NRT products, such as the patch or gum are non-prescription medications that contain nicotine. They reduce cravings by giving the nicotine you would get through smoking, but none of the toxins that are in tobacco smoke.

Two quit medications prescribed in B.C. are bupropion (Zyban®) and generic varenicline.

They do not contain nicotine but work in the brain to manage withdrawal symptoms and nicotine cravings, and can reduce the urge to smoke. See your health care provider or local pharmacist to discuss if these are a good choice for you, and to get a prescription.

### What programs are available in B.C. to help me stop smoking?

#### QuitNow

QuitNow provides support and resources for BC residents ages 10+ who use tobacco or e-cigarettes. It supports you if you want to quit, reduce your use or you are still thinking about it. Trained quit coaches work with you one-on-one to stick to your quit plan and help you through rough patches. The website and online community provide information and motivational support to guide your quit. Features include:

- Creating a personalized online quit plan
- Motivational support by text or email – text QUITNOW to 654321
- Individual support from a quit coach, by phone or live chat on the QuitNow website – call toll-free 1-877-455-2233 or visit <https://quitnow.ca/chat>
- A safe and friendly online community for you to share your story and get support from others on the same journey. Connect with others on the QuitNow forum at <https://quitnow.ca/find-support/forum>

For more information, visit <https://quitnow.ca>.

#### Talk Tobacco

Talk Tobacco is a free, confidential program. It offers culturally appropriate support and information about quitting smoking, vaping and commercial tobacco use to First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities.

- Speak to a quit coach by calling 1 833 998-TALK (8255) or texting CHANGE to 123456
- Visit the Talk Tobacco website to learn more at <https://smokershelpline.ca/talktobacco/home>

To learn more about traditional tobacco and access additional supports to quit commercial tobacco, please visit First Nations Health

Authority: Respecting Tobacco at [www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-for-first-nations/wellness-streams/respecting-tobacco](http://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-for-first-nations/wellness-streams/respecting-tobacco).

### **B.C. Smoking Cessation Program**

The PharmaCare BC Smoking Cessation Program helps eligible B.C. residents who want to stop smoking or using other tobacco products. It covers the cost of a twelve week supply of one of two treatment options outlined below:

- NRT products such as patch or gum
- Prescription smoking cessation medications

See your doctor or visit your local pharmacy to enroll in the program. For more information, visit [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare-for-bc-residents/what-we-cover/bc-smoking-cessation-program](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/pharmacare-for-bc-residents/what-we-cover/bc-smoking-cessation-program).

### **Your health care provider**

Your primary care provider, pharmacist, dentist, counsellor or another health care provider may also have advice on the best option or combination of options for you.

### **Are other tobacco or nicotine products safe?**

Tobacco is sold in many forms in Canada. Examples include spit tobacco, cigars, pipe tobacco and bidis. There is no safe tobacco product. Consuming tobacco in any form poses health risks.

Electronic cigarettes (also called vapes or e-cigarettes) are not technically considered tobacco products. Most contain nicotine and pose health risks from this and other chemicals that you inhale when you vape. While some people have had success using e-cigarettes to help them reduce or quit smoking, continuing to smoke regular cigarettes while vaping does not reduce your risk for smoking-caused illness. Vaping is not harmless. Instead, you may consider the safe

and proven quit-smoking methods like combining NRT with quit coaching.

Nicotine pouches are tobacco-free pouches that release nicotine when placed in the mouth between the gum and cheek. They are approved in Canada to help adults quit smoking.

As these products are relatively new, there is limited evidence about their effectiveness as a quit aid compared to other NRT or pharmaceutical products.

These products are not approved as a tool for youth trying to quit smoking or vaping.

If you choose to use a nicotine pouch to quit, ensure that you are using a Health Canada-approved product. Only use authorized nicotine pouches as directed and do not use unauthorized nicotine pouches. For more information, visit <https://recalls-rappels.canada.ca/en/alert-recall/unauthorized-nicotine-buccal-pouches-may-pose-serious-health-risks-0>.

For more information on tobacco products, visit [HealthLinkBC File #30b Risks of alternative tobacco and nicotine products](#).

### **Will vaping help me quit smoking?**

If using evidence-based approaches such as NRT, prescription medication, and counselling to quit doesn't work for you, switching completely to vaping can increase your chance of staying smoke-free. Compared to cigarettes, vaping exposes you to lower amounts of toxic and cancer-causing chemicals. This does not mean that vaping is safe as it can still cause harm to your health. It is important to switch completely from smoking to vaping to reduce your health risks. You will also need a plan to quit vaping eventually, as long-term use should be avoided. QuitNow's resources are available to help you quit vaping at <https://quitnow.ca/vape-free-quitting>.



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