

# Smoking

and your health and wellbeing

Your reasons for quitting

You can quit – here's how

Staying smoke-free

Smoke-free support



Public Health  
Agency

*“It’s great being free from that addiction... my children are delighted”*



## Going smoke-free

As part of the drive to improve everyone’s physical and mental wellbeing, more and more places across Northern Ireland are becoming smoke-free. Why not use this opportunity to finally quit for good?

This leaflet will show you:

- the harm caused by smoking, particularly if you have mental health difficulties;
- how quitting will make you feel better;
- how you can quit, including medication to help;
- where to get the help and support you need to quit.

## How quitting helps body and mind

- Many people living with mental health problems have successfully quit smoking and reported a wide range of benefits as a result.
- People with mental health problems are likely to feel much calmer and positive and have a better quality of life after giving up smoking. Stopping smoking is associated with mental health benefits (source: *British Medical Journal*, February 2014).
- Nicotine is addictive and recovering from an addiction actually lifts your mood and makes you less anxious.
- You may also feel calmer and less agitated because when you stop smoking your heart rate will go down.
- If you stop smoking and you're on certain medications, your doctor may be able to reduce the dose (see below).

Some of the medicines affected by smoking include:

- antidepressants (eg amitriptyline and mirtazapine)
- opiates (eg methadone)
- antipsychotics (eg clozapine, olanzapine and haloperidol)
- benzodiazepines (eg diazepam).

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**Speak to your doctor if you take any of these medications and want to stop smoking.**

## Did you know?

Smoking can have harmful effects on your physical health, but people often overlook the effects on their mental health. The more you smoke, the more likely you are to:

- feel anxious or depressed;
- use other drugs and alcohol – which can make mental health problems worse;
- have suicidal thoughts – and go on to take your own life (source: Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2015).

## What's stopping you?

There are many reasons why smokers put off quitting:

- *"I've no willpower."* It will get easier the longer you stay smoke-free.
- *"I enjoy smoking."* Smoking only seems to be enjoyable because you are addicted to nicotine. Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRTs) can reduce this to a safe level (see page 6).
- *"How will I cope with stress?"* What feels like stress is really just a craving for nicotine – quitting will make you more relaxed.
- *"What about withdrawal symptoms?"* You may be irritable for a while but it won't last long and licensed nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) may help.
- *"I'm worried about putting on weight."* If you replace cigarettes with snacks, you may gain weight, but stick to eating healthily and being active – this will also help with cravings.

**Make a list of the reasons why you want to stop and you can do it.**

## Your reasons for quitting

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I want to lower my stress levels?
- Do I want to reduce my medication?
- Do I want to feel better?
- Do I want to reduce my chances of developing a serious illness from smoking, such as heart disease, lung cancer, stroke etc?
- Do I want to be in control of my nicotine addiction?
- Do I want to set a good example to my children?
- Do I want to protect my family and friends from the effects of my smoking?
- Do I want to save money? For example, if you smoke 20 a day, you could save over £3,000 a year if you quit.

*“Since quitting, I can go out for a walk now and don’t get out of breath... I have a lot more confidence and a good feeling about life.”*



## You can quit – here's how

Smoking is addictive and it can be difficult to quit, but with the right support **you can do it!** Talking to a health professional can be particularly helpful in supporting you to stop smoking if you have mental health difficulties.

1. Speak to your GP/practice nurse, community pharmacist or Trust specialist who can provide a stop smoking service or will be able to refer you to the services in your area.
2. They can help you create your own 'quit plan', where you can identify your high risk times or situations and plan how to cope with them. The leaflet *Stopping smoking made easier* has practical tips on getting through the first few days (see back cover).
3. They will also be able to advise you on which free, licensed NRT would be best for you or if a prescription medication would be suitable (see below).
4. You can also order a free *Quit Kit* on **want2stop.info** or get an order form from your community pharmacist.



### Licensed nicotine replacement therapies (NRTs)

These are products that provide nicotine without using cigarettes so you can slowly wean yourself off nicotine. They are available as:

- skin patches
- oral strips
- lozenges
- sprays
- gum
- inhalators

Using a licensed NRT during a quit attempt doubles your chance of giving up completely. A licensed NRT combined with counselling and support from a stop smoking service will make you four times more likely to successfully quit.

## A note on e-cigarettes ('vaping')

E-cigarettes are battery-operated devices that deliver nicotine through a vapour that is breathed in. This mimics smoking and is sometimes referred to as 'vaping'. Some people claim to find these helpful in coping with cravings and stopping smoking, however, e-cigarettes are not licensed or controlled and their content and safety cannot be assured and the long-term risks to health are not yet clear.

## Staying smoke-free

When you've quit, keep reminding yourself why you've given up smoking. Stopping smoking is a great achievement with huge benefits, but there will be times when you're tempted to give in and have a cigarette. Stay determined and the temptation will pass. Try these suggestions to help you stay strong:



**Connect** – Make contact with the people around you such as your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours so they will encourage you to quit smoking.



**Be active** – You don't have to go to the gym. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game of football. Find an activity you enjoy and make it part of your life. This will help keep your mind off cigarettes.



**Take notice** – Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling, eg the situations that may trigger cravings in the early days, and try to avoid these when possible. Some people call this awareness 'mindfulness' and it can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.



**Keep learning** – Learning how to manage without cigarettes can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence. Try to relax and deal with stress by staying positive and keeping busy.



**Give** – Giving to others can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks. Support others who also want to stop smoking based on your success.

## Smoke-free support

There are more than 650 free stop smoking services across Northern Ireland. Most of these services provide licensed NRT and are run by specially trained staff who can advise and support you on the best way to stop smoking.

**For help on stopping smoking and a list of local services visit [www.want2stop.info](http://www.want2stop.info)**



**See [www.mindingyourhead.info](http://www.mindingyourhead.info) for information on protecting your mental wellbeing**



### More information

If you have a QR Reader app on your phone, scan the codes below to take you to these Public Health Agency resources.

**Stopping smoking made easier** takes smokers through the stages of quitting  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications)



**The Quit Kit** has been designed by experts and ex-smokers and is full of useful tools to help you quit  
[www.want2stop.info](http://www.want2stop.info)



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