

Smoking: key facts from the Royal College of Psychiatrists

If you have a mental health problem and smoke, you may feel that there's nothing you can do about it. This isn't true. Many people with mental health problems stop smoking and feel better and live longer. You have the same right to help with this as anyone else.

What's in it for me if I stop smoking?

- you'll probably feel much healthier and better
- you may be able to reduce the amount of medication you take
- it's the single most powerful way of improving your health and living longer
- if you stop smoking 10 cigarettes a day, you'll save more than £1000 a year
- you'll be able to get much fitter

And if I don't... ?

- If you have a mental health problem, you probably smoke more than other people, so your smoking is even more likely to harm you.
- You are more likely to be one of the 100 000 people in the UK each year who are killed by smoking.
- You are more likely to die early: on average, you'll live about 10 years less than you would have done if you did not smoke (half of smokers die 15 years earlier than they should and a quarter die 23 years early).
- You are more likely to have breathing problems, heart disease, diabetes and many kinds of cancer (not just lung cancer).

Mental health and smoking

If you have a mental illness, you are more likely to smoke. The more you smoke, the more likely you are to:

- develop a mental illness, but it's unclear why
- feel anxious or depressed
- think about suicide and die by suicide
- use more drugs and alcohol which can make a mental health problem worse.

Overall, if you have a mental health problem and smoke, you are more likely to have poor general health – it's one of the main reasons why people with a mental illness tend to die younger.

If you stop smoking, you can feel better, be healthier and live a lot longer.

Other problems with smoking

- men can find it difficult to get an erection
- women tend to:
 - find it hard to get pregnant
 - have a more difficult pregnancy
 - have babies who are less healthy and have a lower birth weight
- it harms non-smokers who breathe others' smoke
- it's expensive
- if your health is poor, you may not be able to do things you want to, for example work
- most public places don't allow smoking, so you can find yourself shut out from things you might want to do

Isn't it too late to stop?

No. Even if you have smoked since your teenage years:

- if you stop smoking before the age of about 35, you will live nearly as long as people who have never smoked
- if you stop smoking before the age of 50, you will be half as likely to die from smoking-related diseases as someone who carries on smoking.

How will I feel if I stop smoking?

- Probably much healthier and better.
- A few people feel worse for a short time after stopping. This does get better but you may need some extra support if you are finding it hard.
- You may cough more for a while after stopping smoking. This is usually temporary, but may last a few months.

- You may put on weight, but you can control this with exercise and a healthy diet.
- You'll be able to get much fitter.
- You may be able to reduce the amount of medication you take.
- You may feel proud that you have done something that will give you a healthier, longer life.

□ **How can I stop smoking?**

Different people find different things helpful – you need to find what is best for you. Think about:

- self-help
 - read a self-help book
 - do some regular exercise
 - when you think about having a cigarette, remember the 4 Ds:
 - D**istract yourself – think of something to take your mind off smoking, or do something to keep yourself busy
 - D**rink something – drink a soft drink slowly and hold each sip for a few seconds: this replaces the feeling of a cigarette in your hand or smoke in your mouth
 - D**elay – don't smoke when you feel the urge, wait a few minutes and it will pass
 - D**eep breathing
- help and support from other people
 - get advice from your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional – this may be all you need to stop smoking
 - get help from your local NHS stop smoking service
 - telephone/internet support
 - you can get support from a friend, a professional or a group of other people who are giving up smoking
 - pair up with a friend who is also trying to stop
 - at first you may find it easier not to be around friends who smoke, but friends and family can give valuable support
 - some people like acupuncture and hypnotherapy, but clinical trials have not shown that they help.
- some medications can help (see below)
- think about who else you know who you might help if you stop smoking, like your baby or child
- finally, don't be discouraged if you start smoking again – many people do, it's all part of learning not to smoke.

□ **Medications**

- Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)

This is a way of giving your body the nicotine it craves without using cigarettes. It comes as skin patches, gum or inhalers. It seems to work better if you use a patch together with an inhaler or gum. The patches, gum or inhalers can irritate your skin, mouth, throat or nose, but usually just for a short time. NRT doubles your chance of giving up completely.
- Bupropion (Zyban®)

This cuts down the craving but can make it hard to sleep. You should not use it if you have had epilepsy (seizures or fits) or bipolar affective disorder (manic depression).
- Varenicline (Champix®)

This cuts down the craving for nicotine, but if you do have a cigarette, it also cuts down the pleasure you get from it. However, it can make you anxious, give you mood swings and make it hard to sleep. These side-effects are still being researched, so varenicline should usually be avoided if you have a mental health problem.

□ **But I don't think I can stop completely...**

You might feel (especially if you smoke heavily) that you can't stop completely. Don't worry, just:

- cut down before stopping – you don't have to stop suddenly
- keep a diary of when, where and with whom you smoke; this can highlight the times and situations when you are more likely to smoke, so you can plan ways of avoiding them or dealing with them
- while you are cutting down, you can work out ways of coping without cigarettes
- you can use NRT to help you do this.

OK, I stop smoking – what about my mental health?

Depression

You may well feel less depressed. A few people feel more depressed when they stop smoking, so:

- keep in regular contact with your doctor and (if you have one) key worker or case coordinator
- ask if you can have a talking therapy, like cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT).

Schizophrenia

- you may find it harder than other people to stop smoking, but your symptoms won't get worse
- NRT or bupropion can help
- if you use NRT and go to a support group, you are more likely to give up.

Smoking and medication

Smoking can interfere with some medication, so you may have to take a higher dose than you would if you were not smoking. So, if you stop smoking, the amount of some medications in your blood can go up, often within a few days. Your doctor may need to reduce the dose by a quarter or more. However, if you start smoking again, you will probably need to go back to the old dose of medication.

Some of the medicines affected by smoking include:

- antidepressants (the older tricyclics such as amitriptyline and the newer mirtazapine)
- antipsychotics (especially clozapine, olanzapine and haloperidol)
- benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam)
- opiates (e.g. methadone).

What about being in hospital?

Even if you want to carry on smoking, you can't smoke indoors in any mental health unit in the UK (the ban on smoking in hospitals is part of the drive to improve everybody's physical and mental health). Ward staff should be trained to help you to not smoke while you are an in-patient. They can help you to stop smoking, if you want to.

Mental health services can help you with your mental health and with other things.

Your GP, psychiatrist, care coordinator and anyone else you see in mental health services can help you to:

- improve your physical health
- develop a healthy lifestyle (exercise and healthy eating)
- get advice, information, support and, if necessary, medication to stop smoking
- avoid putting on weight after stopping smoking
- make any changes you need to your medication after you stop smoking.

Look after your body and your mind will feel better

You can stop smoking! Ask for help – it's your right.

Resources

- <http://smokefree.nhs.uk>
- RCPsych forum: <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/mentalhealthinprimarycare.aspx>
- NHS stop smoking services: <http://smokefree.nhs.uk/what-suits-me/local-nhs-services>

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