

Must Know Health Info

Health Information from the Experts at Johns Hopkins Medicine



Stop Smoking!

Learn how to quit...and stay quit!

There is a study with good news for people with diabetes who want to stop smoking. A nurse offered a program at hospital diabetes clinics. Six months later, 17 percent of the patients had quit smoking. Most of those who were still smoking had cut back a lot. That 17 percent who quit might seem like a small number. But, it is seven times the number who usually stop smoking over six months. Each time a smoker hears a stop-smoking message, a few take it to heart and quit. So if you smoke, please read on.

How smoking hurts you

People with diabetes who smoke are putting their lives at risk. Many women are afraid of breast cancer. But you may not know that lung cancer kills more women than breast cancer. Smoking also raises your risk for heart attack and stroke. People with diabetes are more likely to have a heart attack or stroke. Four times more likely! If you smoke AND have diabetes, your risk goes up. You are 11 times more likely to have a heart attack or stroke.

More than two out of three people with diabetes die of a heart attack or stroke. Usually, women seem to do a little bit better than men. They usually get heart disease later in life than men do. But, women with diabetes do not have the same advantage. Smoking hurts more than just your heart. It also raises your blood sugar. And it raises the risk for other problems that diabetes may cause. People with diabetes who smoke have:

- more damage to nerves and blood vessels
- more serious foot problems like slow-healing wounds
- more kidney damage

People who smoke are also more likely to get less serious problems. They have:

- more colds
- more tooth and gum problems
- more problems moving their joints

Not a pretty picture, is it? Yet, many people downplay the health risks of smoking. If you want to live a long, healthy life, you should quit smoking. It may be more important than good blood sugar control!

Quitting is hard

Some people with diabetes still smoke, even though it's bad for them. In 2001, 23% of people with diabetes smoked. People with diabetes were just as likely to smoke as those without diabetes.

Quitting is hard. If you never smoked, or have quit, good for you! If you smoke and wish you didn't, knowing why you smoke could be a first step towards quitting. Here are some of the reasons I hear most often.

“I'm addicted.” Cigarettes have nicotine in them. Nicotine is addictive, so it's no surprise many people are “hooked.” If you try to quit, you may get headaches and feel dizzy or restless. This is because your body misses the nicotine. You may even feel this way when you have not had a cigarette for awhile. One woman told me that when she tried to quit smoking she had cravings like she was longing for a lost love.

“Smoking gives me energy.” Nicotine works like coffee for some people. It wakes them up and gets them going. When they are tired, it can also keep them going.

“I smoke to relax.” Many people say smoking helps ease stress. It's amazing, but nicotine can pick you up and it can settle you down.

“I like smoking.” Most smokers tell me they enjoy smoking. It brings them pleasure and makes good times even better.

“Smoking curbs my appetite.” Some people say they eat less when they smoke. This can be important for people with diabetes, especially women, who may be worried about their weight.

How to quit

There is not *one* right way to quit smoking. Some people just decide they will never smoke again, and they stop then and there. Most people have a harder time quitting. Many try several times before they succeed. The best way for you to quit might depend on why you smoke.

If you smoke because you are addicted, nicotine patches or gum may help. Ask your health care provider about them. Acupuncture or hypnosis can also help. Tell family and friends that you are quitting and ask for their support. Avoid being tempted, and hang in there when you commit to quit. Withdrawal symptoms like headaches last for a few weeks.

If you smoke because it gives you more energy, look for other ways to increase your get up and go. Get plenty of rest, find ways to be more active, eat well and avoid being bored.

If smoking relaxes you, getting more rest, moving more and cutting stress can help you quit. So can doing things that relax you, like listening to soothing music.

If you simply enjoy smoking, try focusing on the upside of quitting. Pay attention to how food tastes when you don't smoke. Notice how good you look and feel about yourself.

If you smoke to control your weight, talk to your health care provider or a dietitian about how not to gain weight when you quit.

Staying off cigarettes

Many people say they are very tempted by cigarettes for at least three months after they quit. And it only takes one cigarette to get you right back to your old habit. Staying off cigarettes can be very hard.

Keep in mind your reasons for quitting. Do you want to avoid nerve damage from diabetes? Live to see your grandchildren grow up? Feel better day-to-day? Or save the money you spend on cigarettes? Think about what you could do with the money you would save each year.

Best wishes for a long, healthy, smoke-free life.