

## Cold Turkey or Bust: Can I Quit?

What exactly is quitting “cold turkey”? The most likely explanation of that expression is that the cold sweats and goose bumps of a withdrawing addict are similar to the skin of a cold turkey. Not a pleasant image, but the advantage to the “cold turkey” method is that the person makes a clean break from the addiction. That may work for some, but for others, the very thought of never using tobacco again is horrifying. Yet, most tobacco users want to quit. In the past year, 41% say they’ve tried to quit but only 4 to 5% had succeeded. It is a hard habit (and addiction) to break. Quitting cold turkey has the highest success rate by far, but it is important to know there are other options besides quitting cold turkey—and you don’t have to bust.

### Step One: Making the Commitment

- If you’re quitting because others insist, you are more likely to fail. Make a list of all the reasons YOU want to quit. This can include concerns about your health and your children’s health, the expense of your habit, wanting to really smell and taste good food, **and** your love for the people in your life who worry about you.
- Talk to your friends and family about your decision and ask for specific kinds of support. Let them know that nagging is not helpful but being able to listen when you are craving tobacco is. Also suggest that unsolicited advice or materials on quitting are not helpful but following the plan of action you have selected is. Make a list of the people on your support team and post where you can find it when you need it.

### Step Two: Choosing a Plan of Action

Many resources are available with information on what tobacco is doing to you and what you can do to stop it. Shop around, but also talk to a medical professional about your decision. Your doctor or dentist can help you select a plan or program that best suits you. There are many nicotine replacement products such as gum, patches, and lozenges. There are also two FDA approved drugs that may help. Following are some of the websites with tobacco cessation information and programs.

- The South Dakota QuitLine ([www.befreesd.com/quitline.html](http://www.befreesd.com/quitline.html)): Information, coaching, discounts on nicotine withdrawal products, and free professional advice. 1-866-SD QUIT (1-866-737-8487).
- CDC, NIH, and other government agencies ([www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)): Programs for quitting and staying quit along with other publications and information on quit lines.
- National Cancer Institute’s Smoking Quitline ([www.cancer.gov/help](http://www.cancer.gov/help)): Individualized counseling, printed information, referrals, counselors, and an online instant messaging service.
- American Cancer Society ([www.cancer.org/](http://www.cancer.org/)): Materials on quitting smoking, other tobacco-related topics, and quit smoking clinic.
- American Heart Association ([www.americanheart.org/](http://www.americanheart.org/)): Information on local and community intervention programs.
- Nicotine Anonymous ([www.nicotine-anonymous.org](http://www.nicotine-anonymous.org)): Non-profit 12-step program and database of meetings by state and country. There are also Internet and telephone meetings.

### Step Three: Gearing Up

- Begin a journal with the list of all your personal reasons for quitting. The second page will be a list of your support team members and their contact information. Journal daily and include copies of all your lists and activities.
- Educate yourself about the process of withdrawal. Your years of dependency on tobacco changed your mind and body, and both will object when you quit. You may experience mood swings, irritability, weight gain, fatigue, anxiety, and almost overpowering cravings, and you will need strategies to cope with these.

## Cold Turkey or Bust: Can I Quit?, cont.

### Step Three: Gearing Up, cont.

- Also educate yourself about the process of recovery. Make a list of everything good that will happen in your mind and body and post it where you can see it often during the day. Some examples follow.
  1. Just twenty minutes after quitting your blood pressure, pulse rate, and body temperature return to normal.
  2. Eight hours after quitting, your oxygen blood level increases to normal and the carbon monoxide level decreases to normal.
  3. At twenty-four hours, your chance of having a heart attack begins to decrease.
  4. At 48 hours, your nerve endings start to re-grow. Your ability to smell and taste will increase.
  5. At 72 hours, your body is nicotine free (unless you are using nicotine replacement products).
- Talk to people who have quit using tobacco. Find out what worked for them and what didn't.
- Read all materials for your program and/or nicotine replacement products and/or medications. Make sure you know how to use everything properly.
- Choose your quitting date carefully. Try for a period where there aren't other powerful stressors like a change of jobs or a holiday season. Set a date two weeks in advance and start training. Post a calendar with the date and plan a preparatory activity for each date before the big one. Let your support team know your quit date.

### Step Four: Training for the Big Day

- Start weakening the mental habits associated with your tobacco use by changing them. Your tobacco use has become a ritual linked to certain daily activities, such as smoking after eating, while talking on the phone, or during a fight with a spouse. Keep a daily log of each tobacco use and what was associated with it. List activities you can do instead of lighting up. Mild daily exercise is an excellent substitute.
- During this training period, use the four D's when you want tobacco: Delay, Deep Breathe, Drink Water, Do Something Else. You are weakening the mental habits and strengthening your commitment to quitting.
- The "Do Something Else" tactic is a way to start training your mind to accept other rewards. Fill a box with cigarette (or tobacco) substitutes and keep the box wherever you used to keep your tobacco. Suggestions are apples, carrot sticks, sunflower seeds, chewing gum, straws, paper clips pens, rubber bands, or hard candy. Also practice those replacement activities you're developing (for example, taking a nap or a walk).
- Make plans to remove all tobacco from your house, car, and workplace and do this before your official Quit Day. If others in your household are using tobacco, agree on a location for their use and storage of tobacco. Avoid that place for at least two weeks.

Mark Twain once said, "Quitting is easy. I've done it a thousand times." You know this won't be easy, and you know many users need more than that first attempt. So, as you prepare to quit, acknowledge that this may be a long process involving several commitments, plans, and attempts. No attempt is a failure. Each assault on your addiction will teach you what works and what doesn't. Eventually, if you can stay tobacco-free for three months or longer, you have an excellent chance of remaining free for the rest of your life.

For more information on tobacco cessation, please visit:  
[www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLuk9O0E/b.22931/k.8550/Smoking\\_Cessation\\_Support.htm](http://www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLuk9O0E/b.22931/k.8550/Smoking_Cessation_Support.htm)  
<http://thescooponsmoking.org/xhtml/quittingHome.php>  
<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Tobacco/cessation>