



# Nicotine dependence and withdrawal

**Tobacco contains more than 7,000 chemicals that are harmful to people including 70 chemicals that are known to cause cancer. Nicotine is the addictive chemical in tobacco. Knowing if you are dependent on nicotine and knowing about the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal can help you to manage better while quitting.**

## Are you nicotine dependent?

These three questions can help you decide if you are dependent on nicotine:

1. Do you smoke within 30 minutes of waking?
2. Do you smoke 10 or more cigarettes each day?
3. Did you experience cravings and withdrawals last time you tried to quit?

If you answered yes to any of these questions then you are dependent on nicotine. There are things you can do to help you prepare for quitting and assist you on your quit journey such as:

- Read the **Getting ready to quit smoking** fact sheet available on [www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au) (Search: *Getting ready to quit smoking*).
- Talk to your doctor.
- Call the **Quitline on 13 7848 (13 QUIT)**.

## The good news about quitting

Quitting smoking has immediate and long-term health benefits. From your first day of quitting your body begins to repair itself. Within days your smell and taste improves and your breathing improves making exercise easier. Within one to nine months, coughing and shortness of breath also decrease.

## Nicotine withdrawal

People experience nicotine withdrawal differently. Some people find it more challenging than others. Many people find nicotine withdrawal is worst in the first 24 - 48 hours of quitting.

Most people experience some of the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal and they usually don't all happen at once. Withdrawal occurs over time as your body begins to get rid of its dependence on nicotine. It helps to think of the nicotine withdrawal symptoms as 'recovery symptoms.' After about two weeks, recovery symptoms are usually less severe.

Using nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products (patch, gum, lozenge, inhalator, oral strips and mouth spray) can dramatically reduce symptoms of nicotine withdrawal, provided you use enough NRT each day to control withdrawal symptoms and cravings and consistently use NRT for 8-12 weeks. For more information on NRT products and prescription medications to assist quitting.

- Read the **Products that help you quit** fact sheet available on [www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au) (Search: *Products that help you quit*).
- Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or smoking cessation advisor.
- Contact **Quitline on 13 7848 (13 QUIT)**.

## Symptoms of nicotine withdrawal

### Irritability and anxiety

You might feel irritable or anxious. These feelings can be made worse by caffeine. Smoking reduces the effect of caffeine and when you quit you become more sensitive to the effects of caffeine. Try to halve your usual caffeine intake by drinking half as much coffee, tea, energy drinks and cola. Relaxing activities, such as taking a short break from work or going for a walk, can also help.

### Difficulty concentrating

The changes that are happening in your body and cravings for cigarettes may make it more difficult to concentrate. This can start to improve after a few days as your brain adjusts to getting more oxygen.

It might help to do tasks in small 'bite-size' chunks. Take regular breaks and do something active to clear your mind. Your concentration levels will improve over time.

### Restlessness and insomnia

Some people feel as though they can't sit still and need to move about or do something with their hands. You can use this in a positive way by doing some physical activity that you enjoy. Some people also find it harder to sleep when they're quitting (insomnia). Restlessness and insomnia are made worse by caffeine. Halving caffeine intake helps.

### Cravings

Cravings are a normal part of quitting. They last usually no more than a few minutes. Some people experience a series of cravings and this can be very challenging. As time passes, your cravings will usually be less strong, be shorter and happen less often.

Some people keep a diary to record how they feel, including how often and strong their cravings are. This can help to show that things are improving. Talking to **Quitline (13 7848)** can help you with ideas on how to manage your cravings.

### Dizziness

Smoking raises your blood pressure over time. When you stop smoking, your blood pressure can drop quite quickly in the first few days of a quit attempt, so that if you stand up too quickly, you may feel dizzy for a short time. This usually passes in a few days.

### Appetite changes

Some people start to feel hungrier when they quit smoking. This is because nicotine can suppress your appetite. Drink plenty of water and make sure that you eat a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.

As you start feeling more energetic and breathing becomes easier, gradually increase your physical activity. This will help you to maintain a healthy weight.

### Remember

- **If you are concerned about any of these symptoms talk to your doctor or phone Quitline on 13 7848 (13 QUIT).**
- **Nicotine withdrawal can be a challenge, especially in the first few days or weeks of quitting.**
- **Most withdrawal symptoms will have gone or be more manageable within the first few weeks of quitting.**
- **Long term benefits of quitting outweigh the short term discomfort of nicotine withdrawal symptoms.**
- **Stay positive and be kind to yourself while you're experiencing 'recovery symptoms'.**
- **Use of NRT (patches, gum, lozenges, inhalator, oral strips and mouth spray) can dramatically reduce your symptoms of nicotine withdrawal.**
- **Most people undertake a number of quit attempts before succeeding. Keep this in mind and keep going and you will succeed.**

**For help with quitting smoking contact the Quitline 13 7848 (13 QUIT) or speak with your health professional.**

Visit the websites: [www.icanquit.com.au](http://www.icanquit.com.au) and [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au)