

## Why Do I Keep Smoking?

### Did you know?

- All tobacco products and many e-cigarettes contain nicotine.
- Nicotine is highly addictive.
- It is very hard to quit smoking without dealing with nicotine addiction.



### What does it mean to be addicted to nicotine?

Being addicted to nicotine means your body and brain depend on nicotine to feel comfortable. If you are not getting enough nicotine, then you will have symptoms of withdrawal.

### How does nicotine addiction happen?

Nicotine is a highly addictive chemical found in all forms of tobacco and in most types of e-cigarettes.

When you use tobacco, in any form, the nicotine enters your body and is absorbed into your bloodstream. The nicotine then goes to all the organs in your body. Nicotine causes the brain to release chemicals such as dopamine that produce feelings of pleasure and reduce anxiety and stress.

The more you use tobacco, the more nicotine your brain gets. And, the more nicotine your brain gets, the more nicotine your brain wants.

The faster nicotine gets into your body, the more addictive it is for the brain. Cigarettes, including e-cigarettes, have been designed to give the brain high levels of nicotine very quickly.

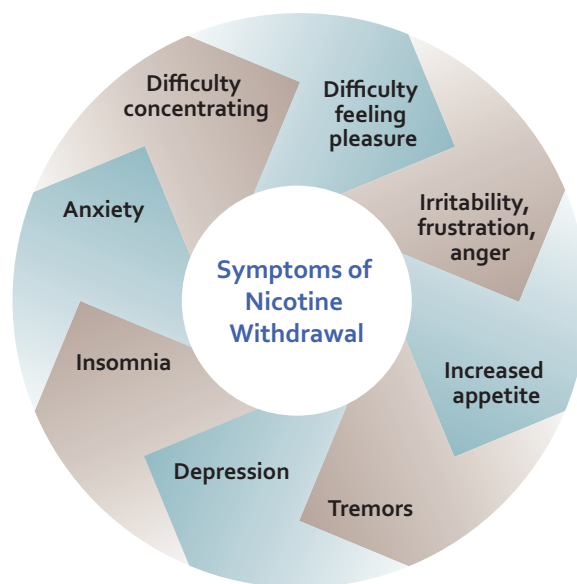
Addiction to nicotine can happen fast. You can become addicted after smoking for a short time or smoking a few times.

### Why is it so hard to quit smoking?

When you are addicted to nicotine, your body and brain always want more. Nicotine affects the area of the brain responsible for basic survival. When this area gets less nicotine, then the brain sees it as a threat to survival and creates an urge or “need” to smoke.

Shortly after you stop smoking your brain and body start to “withdraw” from nicotine. The relaxing feeling

produced by nicotine may turn into feelings of anxiety, irritability, and/or restlessness. As soon as you smoke or use other tobacco products again these feelings go away. It is hard to stop this cycle.



### Am I addicted to nicotine?

Nicotine addiction is not the same for everyone. A reliable indication that you may be addicted to nicotine is how soon after waking up you reach for a cigarette. If you smoke within 30 minutes of waking up, your addiction is likely to be pretty strong. Other signs of nicotine addiction include smoking even when you are sick and finding it difficult to not smoke in places it's not allowed (e.g. hospitals, churches, school). Experiencing nicotine withdrawal when you try to stop smoking is another sign that you may be addicted to nicotine.

Healthcare providers can use a 6-item test called the Fagerstrom Test for Nicotine Dependence to determine the severity of your nicotine addiction. Based on your answers to this test your level of addiction can be described as severely dependent, moderately dependent, or minimally dependent.

A simpler test called the Heaviness of Smoking Index has only 2 questions. If you score higher than 3 points (Heaviness of Smoking Index), then you may be addicted to nicotine.

1. On the days that you smoke, how soon after you wake up do you have your first cigarette?
  - A. Within 5 minutes (3 points)
  - B. 6-30 minutes (2 points)
  - C. 31-60 minutes (1 point)
  - D. After 60 minutes (0 points)
2. How many cigarettes do you typically smoke per day?
  - A. 10 or fewer (0 points)
  - B. 11-20 (1 point)
  - C. 21-30 (2 points)
  - D. 31 or more (3 points)

SCORING: 0-2: low addiction 3-4: moderate addiction  
5-6: high addiction

### How can I stop using nicotine products?

It is very hard to quit smoking. Having help and support can make quitting smoking and stopping tobacco products easier. There are medications that can help decrease nicotine withdraw symptoms and increase comfort while trying to stop smoking.

**IMPORTANT:** Switching to "light" cigarettes or to e-cigarettes does NOT usually lead to quitting. E-cigarettes are NOT recommended smoking cessation tools.

It is best to talk to your healthcare provider about the safest and most effective ways to quit smoking. You can also find more information at [www.thoracic.org/patient](http://www.thoracic.org/patient).

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## Rx Action Steps

- ✓ Make a list of the risks of continued smoking and the rewards of quitting for you.
- ✓ Pay attention to your smoking pattern and whether you crave nicotine or have symptoms of withdrawal from nicotine.
- ✓ Talk to your healthcare provider about the most effective ways to manage your nicotine addiction.
- ✓ Set a goal date to stop smoking.
- ✓ Ask others to help support your efforts to quit using tobacco.
- ✓ For additional help in quitting, join a local quit smoking support group or call toll-free 1-800-QUIT-NOW in the US or 1-866-366-3667 in Canada).

**Healthcare Provider's Contact Number:**

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## Additional Resources:

**American Thoracic Society**

<https://www.thoracic.org/patients>

**Easy to use information about smoking and how to stop.**

<https://betobaccofree.hhs.gov>

**American Lung Association**

<http://www.lung.org/stop-smoking/>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/quit-smoking/index.html>

**Public Health England**

<https://www.nhs.uk/smokefree>

<https://mylifemyquit.com/>

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