

Quitting Tobacco and Weight Gain

Many people who quit tobacco worry about gaining weight. Most gain less than 10 pounds after they quit, but some gain more than that. It's important to learn what you can do to keep your weight at a level that's acceptable to you.

How is Tobacco Related to Weight?

When you use tobacco you take in nicotine. Nicotine increases your metabolism and makes you burn your calories from food differently. This keeps you from gaining weight as easily.

Nicotine also decreases feelings of hunger.

Some tobacco users snack less or cut out dessert because they have a cigarette or a chew instead.

When you quit tobacco, your metabolism and appetite return to normal, which may lead you to eat more and burn fewer calories.

Also, your ability to smell and taste food improves after you quit tobacco. This can make food more appealing, which may lead you to eat more. And if you substitute snacking for smoking, the calories can quickly add up.

Because quitting can be uncomfortable, people sometimes turn to food to feel better. This is part of what makes you gain weight after quitting.

Gaining weight after quitting is not inevitable, though!

Things You Can Do to Minimize Weight Gain

Be Active

Choosing some type of activity can help increase your metabolism and keep your weight down. Exercise is also a great way to beat cravings. Exercise will clear your mind and improve your attitude. It doesn't have to be a high intensity aerobic workout. A short walk – like around your neighborhood – will work wonders.

Use Medications

Bupropion SR (Zyban®) is a one of the main medications used to help people quit smoking. For some people, it has a side effect of reducing appetite. Therefore it may be a good choice to help smokers who are concerned about their weight. Other medications – especially nicotine gum and nicotine lozenge – sometimes help to delay weight gain, giving the person time to choose some new activities and healthy eating habits.

Have Healthy Snacks on Hand

It's helpful to have snacks available ahead of time so that when the munchies hit, you've got good food choices within easy reach. Here are some healthy ideas:

- Raw vegetables – celery, carrots, broccoli, peppers
- Reduced-fat popcorn
- Sunflower seeds in the shell
- Fresh fruit – apples, oranges, grapes, bananas
- Fat-free yogurt
- Fat-free fudgesicles or popsicles
- Sugar-free hard candies, lollipops
- Herbal teas
- Hot cocoa made with nonfat milk
- Ice water

If you're concerned about weight gain, it's helpful to remove tempting, high fat foods from your home (things like chips, cookies and ice cream).

Avoid Drinking Alcohol

Not only is alcohol high in calories, but it can be a huge reminder to use tobacco. For many people, tobacco and drinking go together. Avoid the empty calories in alcohol and don't put yourself at risk of relapse by drinking early in your quit.

Practice Good Self-Care

Be Kind to Yourself

Quitting tobacco is a huge accomplishment, and it's important to remember that you're doing a great job. Find healthy ways to reward yourself for your progress, such as fun outings with friends or new hobbies.

Be Patient

Quitting tobacco is a process over time. Give yourself the time you need to heal.

If you gain weight while going through the process of quitting tobacco, that's ok. Tobacco use is a much greater health risk than the weight you may gain during your quit. The benefits of quitting will affect your life in more ways than you can imagine. You don't have to let the fear of gaining weight keep you addicted to a dangerous substance, one that hurts your health and can shorten your life.

It's never too late to quit!

MaineHealth
Center for Tobacco
Independence