

TOBACCO FACTS

What is happening to smoking rates in Canada?

Smoking rates have gone down in Canada over the last 20 years. This is because there is better education and treatment to help smokers quit. High taxes also cause many people to quit. However, smoking rates are still high—19% of people in Canada over the age of 15 still smoke. Smoking rates are also high in teenage girls.

How many smokers want to quit?

Studies consistently show that 70 - 80% of smokers want to quit.

Why do people keep smoking?

Nicotine is very addictive. Experts say cigarette and other inhaled tobacco smoke is as addictive as heroin or cocaine. While habit and social pressures may play a part in smoking, the addiction to nicotine is what makes it so hard to quit.

Why is nicotine so addictive?

Nicotine causes the release of a chemical in the brain (dopamine). Dopamine creates a feeling of relaxation and well-being. Between cigarettes, the level of dopamine drops causing unpleasant symptoms like irritability, anxiety, or tension. The longer you smoke the more nicotine your body needs to cause dopamine release. This is often why the amount you smoke increases over time.

Is the damage already done for people who have smoked for a long time?

Health benefits start almost right away when someone quits smoking and continues for many years. Many of the negative effects from cigarette smoking improve over time.

What are some of the health effects from smoking?

There are over two dozen diseases associated with smoking. About 85% of cases of lung cancer are caused by smoking. Other cancers, heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke are all associated with cigarette smoking. One of the fastest growing illnesses, chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD), is almost always caused by smoking.

What are the health benefits of quitting smoking?

- **20 minutes after quitting**, your heart rate drops
- **12 hours after quitting**, the carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal
- **1 year after quitting**, your added risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker's
- **10 years after quitting**, your lung cancer death rate is about half of that of a smoker's. Your risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney and pancreas decreases

(Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004)

What is the best way to quit smoking?

It is clear that the best way to stop smoking is to combine a “quit smoking” program with some kind of medical treatment. The medical treatments all help to reduce the craving and withdrawal symptoms seen with nicotine addiction.

What kinds of medication help people quit?

There are medications that have been shown to help smokers quit. Nicotine replacement (patches or gum) and oral medication like Champix® have been shown to help smokers quit. Remember, combining a non-smoking program with any of these treatments doubles successful quit rates!

Can't you get addicted to nicotine gum or patches?

Addiction to nicotine gum or patches is rare. Nicotine absorbed through the skin or GI tract is not as addictive as inhaled nicotine. It is much easier to stop these treatments over time. Importantly, nicotine itself is not nearly as dangerous as the toxic ingredients in cigarette smoke. In fact, heart attack victims who smoke before the attack are routinely given nicotine patches to help them get over the withdrawal from having to suddenly quit. Nicotine replacement can be given safely, even in this “high risk” group.

Aren't the oral smoking cessation medications dangerous?

Oral smoking cessation products are safe. As with all medications, there can be side effects. Your healthcare provider can help you decide which treatment is best to help you quit smoking.

Remember—cigarette smoking kills. Almost half of people who smoke will die from a smoking related illness before the age of 70.

(Source: Questions adapted from a Calgary Foothills Primary Care Network patient communication tool)

What do I do if I want to quit smoking?

Alberta Health Services offer workshops to those who want to quit or reduce smoking. These workshops will significantly increase quit rates (when combined with medication):

- FREE
- Presentation in Cantonese
- Facilitated by a highly qualified medical professional
- Up-to-date information, highly recommended by your doctor
- Mutual support from other participants

To enrol, please call 403-650-4933(Cantonese line)

People are generally afraid of trying and getting help because they have failed to quit before. However, the resources will benefit you because on average, people try to quit 7 times before they succeed.

For More Information:

To speak to a health professional, contact your family doctor. For 24-hour nurse advice and health information, call Health Link Calgary 403-943-LINK (5465, or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll free.

Mandarin Health Link Calgary 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link Calgary 403-943-1556.