

Quit Smoking - Your Health Depends on It

All New Zealanders will be aware of the health dangers of smoking, and there is no doubt this awareness has led to a reduction in the numbers of people smoking. Even so, too many continue to smoke, and there remains the need to keep reminding people about quitting and the benefits it brings. In fact, quitting is one of the best health measures you can take and there are immediate health benefits for people with smoking-related diseases.

Tobacco smoking is a major cause of death and disability, especially amongst Maori whose rates of smoking are double that of European New Zealanders. Even passive smoking – inhaling second-hand smoke – is the cause of death for many people. Smoking-related costs are huge and affect government's health budgets, not to mention your own spending choices. When you know that the deaths and disability are preventable, and when you think about how much money you spend on cigarettes, why would you want to be a smoker?

“Quitting smoking is not easy though”, acknowledge Self Care pharmacists. “But if you have the motivation to quit, and you are determined to do it, you can.” So what would be your motivator? Consider this; Tobacco smoke is made up of 4,000 chemicals, and many gases. Nicotine is the most addictive chemical. It causes the blood vessels in your body to narrow, making it harder for blood to flow around. This raises your blood pressure, strains your heart and results in health problems that can affect your enjoyment of life, now and later on. Carbon monoxide gas 'starves' your body of oxygen so that your heart has to work harder - adding extra strain. Tar contains substances that cause cancer.

There is no glamour in cigarette smoking, and nothing cool about what it does to the body. It can irritate the eyes, nose, throat and lower respiratory tract. Diseases of the lungs, especially asthma, are made worse by smoking, and smokers are at high risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) which causes permanent lung damage and eventually is fatal. Smoking increases the risk of developing cancers of the lung, throat and mouth, of blood clots that can lead to heart disease or stroke (blocked blood vessels in the brain and loss of brain function), and poor blood circulation that can lead to limb amputation.

If these health risks don't scare you into quitting, what about the costs to you directly? If you are a 20 cigarette-a-day smoker, in a year you spend over \$4000. That is a lot of money going up in smoke, and a lot of other things on which you are missing out because your money is being diverted. What about stopping for the sake of your children's health? Your smoking is one of the main influences on whether or not they will smoke. If you quit, not only will you improve your health but also the health of your children, and their children.

Never think it is too late to give up. Even if you have smoked for years, it is worth quitting. Even if you have tried many times before, give it another go. It can take many attempts to become completely smoke free, and this time you could be successful. And never think you have to do it alone. There are many individuals and organisations that can assist and encourage you. “We can help,” offer *Self Care pharmacists*, “by providing advice, and medicines such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), to help overcome your nicotine addiction. Using NRT can double the likelihood that a quit attempt will be successful, and with our support, or the support from other quit-smoking counsellors (eg at Quitline – phone 0800 778 778), this likelihood is increased.” Through Quitline you may be eligible for a course of NRT at reduced prices.

Some NRT products can be used to help people (those not quite ready to quit now) to reduce the number of cigarettes smoked before actually quitting. Talk to your *Self Care pharmacist* about this ‘cut-down-then-quit’ approach. If used, you need to aim to stop smoking completely within 6 months.

The advantages of staying smoke free are so many that once you have quit, you will never want to return to your old habits. Don't forget to use all the resources that are available to you, including your local *Self Care pharmacist*, and ask us about our **Quit Smoking** Self Care fact card.