

EXPRESS SCRIPTS CANADA  
**PHARMACY**



# Quitting Smoking

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# Why Quit?

The devastating health effects of long-term smoking are well-documented. Cigarettes contain about 4,000 different chemicals, and about 70 of them are known to cause cancer. In addition to the nicotine that leads to long-term addiction, you are ingesting tar, formaldehyde, lead and arsenic, just to name a few of the more harmful ingredients. Cigars, pipes and e-cigarettes are no better.



Smoking is the number one cause of premature death in Canada. Every day, 100 Canadians die from a smoking-related illness. It increases your risk for lung cancer (and other cancers), heart disease, and several other respiratory conditions like emphysema and COPD. It also worsens asthma symptoms.

But you are not the only one at risk. Your second-hand smoke also puts others at risk, including your family. In fact in Canada, about 800 non-smokers die each year from exposure to second-hand smoke.

In the shorter term, the chemicals in cigarettes also accelerate the outward signs of aging, robbing your skin of elasticity, making your hair dull or even grey, and discolouring your teeth.

**Many of the negative effects of smoking can be reversed, but first you have to quit.**

## Why is it so hard to quit?

Nicotine is as addictive as alcohol, heroin or cocaine, and nicotine is the most common addiction of them all.

Nicotine stimulates dopamine centres in your brain, causing feelings of pleasure and calm. When you smoke habitually, your brain comes to expect these pleasant feelings, and going without nicotine (withdrawal) can lead to irritability, trouble concentrating and weight gain.

You also form habits and routines around your smoking that may be even harder to overcome. That morning cigarette with your coffee. The afternoon smoke break with your workmates. The physical addiction to nicotine can begin to fade after a week, but these habits may last much longer.

## Can I quit?

Quitting smoking is hard. Without support, those who try to quit “cold turkey” are only successful 3% to 6% of the time. The latest research suggests that long-time smokers can try to quit 30 or more times before quitting for good. But the good news is that it is possible. In fact, **more than half of all Canadians who at one time smoked have now successfully kicked the habit.**

## Can I get help to quit?

Medically speaking, there are a number of products on the market that you can take to help you fight off nicotine cravings during the first few weeks/months after you quit.

- **Nicotine replacement (over-the-counter)**

Some products you can buy over-the-counter work by replacing the nicotine you get from cigarettes. Then you gradually reduce the dose until your body no longer needs nicotine at all. These products can come in the form of lozenges, gum, inhalers or patches that you wear on your skin.

- **Prescription medication to curb cravings**

You can also get a prescription from your doctor for non-nicotine medication. This usually comes in a pill and works by blocking the dopamine response described above. Smoking will no longer make you feel good, making it easier to stop.

- **Support**

In terms of changing your habits, there are a number of support groups that can help you share the experience of quitting with other people, and give you somewhere to turn when you have a moment of weakness. Ask your doctor about support groups in your area.

*Disclaimer: The information found in this brochure is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist or physician. If you have any questions specific to your health, please contact your healthcare provider.*