

# How to Deal With Nicotine Withdrawal

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In general, the pains associated with nicotine withdrawal are short-lived with symptoms peaking during the first three days. Despite this, nicotine withdrawal symptoms can and do include just about every discomfort you can think of. Most people will experience some of these symptoms, but rarely all of them. Be sure to check with your doctor if you are experiencing a physical reaction to smoking cessation that concerns you or if symptoms of nicotine withdrawal persist or worsen.

It's important to implement lifestyle habits that can help ease the symptoms of withdrawal. This article includes tips to beat back cravings and help reinforce your decision to quit.

If you or a loved one are struggling with substance use or addiction, contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at **1-800-662-4357** for information on support and treatment facilities in your area.

For more mental health resources, see our National Helpline Database.

## <sup>1</sup> Create a Quit Journal

A quit journal is a valuable tool that can help you reinforce your resolve to stop smoking. It can help at the moment when you're struggling, and it can also help lend perspective on how far you've come when you read back through it.

Consider making the first entry in your journal a list of the reasons you have to quit smoking. From the largest, most obvious reasons to the smallest, each and everyone counts.

## **2 Stay Well-Hydrated With Water**

Water is critical for the human body to function properly. It makes up 2/3 of our body weight, and every cell and organ depends on it. Without water, a person would die within days.

When we quit smoking, water eases some of the discomforts that often come with nicotine withdrawal:

- Constipation
- Coughing
- Cravings to smoke
- Hunger/urge to eat

Water also helps flush residual nicotine out of the body, and by keeping yourself well-hydrated, you'll feel better overall. That can only help as you make your way through the discomforts of nicotine withdrawal.

## **3 Eat Nutrient-Dense Foods**

When we quit smoking, our bodies suffer a bit of shock. Most of us have been inhaling not only nicotine multiple times a day for years but all the rest of the chemicals in cigarettes as well. While it's not a healthy state, our bodies were used to the regimen, and detox can come as a physical, not to mention emotional shock.

Combat this by making it a point to eat food that gives your body the nutrition it needs. Adding a daily multivitamin during early smoking cessation is a good idea too.

Pamper yourself with a few treats here and there, but don't go overboard. Eating foods that are higher in fats or sugar will not erase the cravings that come with nicotine withdrawal, and the guilt might just put you at risk for relapse.

Moderation is key. Think 80/20—80% nutritious and 20% treats. This ratio should keep you fueled and satisfied during the discomforts of nicotine withdrawal.

## **4 Exercise Regularly**

Adding some form of exercise to your daily routine will improve both your physical health and your state of mind, especially as you move through nicotine withdrawal.

Exercise helps you control the mood swings and urges to smoke that are common during this time because it releases endorphins, the "feel-good" hormone.

If it's been a while since you've worked up a sweat, check in with your doctor to ensure there aren't any limitations that would hinder a new exercise program.

Start slow. If you haven't been active recently, begin with a 10- or 15-minute walk a couple of times a day and work up from there. Be patient with yourself, and don't try to do too much too soon.

Think of exercise as a tool, not a chore. It can help you beat back cravings to smoke and counteract the temporary weight gain that often comes with early smoking cessation.

## 5 Reward Yourself

Quitting tobacco is hard work, and *every single day* you complete smoke-free early on is a victory, plain and simple. Additionally, as smokers, we learn to expect instant gratification, and a daily treat of some type early on in cessation is therapeutic.

The reward doesn't need to be big, but it should be something that helps you feel like you've pampered yourself a bit.

A few ideas:

- Do some gardening
- Enlist someone else in the family to cook dinner
- Find a quiet corner and time alone to read a good book
- Head for the gym
- Take a hot bath
- Take a power nap

Think of your daily reward as an investment in your smoke-free future. When you take the time to relieve the stress of your day and recharge your batteries, you're doing your best to ensure that you'll be able to greet the next new day with strength and resolve.

## **6 Practice Deep Breathing**

Cravings to smoke usually come on fast and with force. They start off strong and fade in intensity within three to five minutes. Don't panic when you're hit with an intense urge to smoke. Take a few moments to concentrate on your breathing, and you'll be able to weather the craving successfully.

Deep breathing is a quick way to stop a negative mindset that is threatening to spin out of control. Use the tips in the articles below to help you develop a technique that you can employ at a moment's notice. When cravings to smoke strike, you'll want to act quickly.

## **7 Find a New Distraction**

Sometimes the best thing we can do when craving a cigarette is to simply redirect your attention to something different and interesting. Nine times out of 10, the urge is gone within moments.

Our thoughts color our lives. If you find that yours are taking you places you'd rather not go, take charge and shift your focus with a little distraction.

## **8 Sleep More**

That foggy, lethargic feeling after you quit smoking is completely normal. As smokers, we were accustomed to receiving doses of nicotine and approximately 7,000 other chemicals 20 to 40 times a day. The stress of abruptly cutting off that supply, as unhealthy as it was, can leave us feeling extraordinarily fatigued.

If you're tired and can manage it during the day, take a power nap. Go to bed a little earlier than usual too, if you need to. Your body is working hard right now to overcome the effects of nicotine withdrawal, and some extra sleep will do you good.

On the other hand, if you're at the opposite end of the spectrum and find yourself unable to sleep because of nicotine withdrawal, use sleeping tips to help you catch a few zzzs.

# Find Support

Your commitment to quitting smoking permanently will be much easier to sustain if you have strong, positive support around you.

Friends and family are a part of that hopefully, but they may not understand the depth of what quitting smoking means to you, especially if they've never smoked. Your resolve will be bolstered more than you can imagine just by being around others who have the same goals you do.

## <sup>10</sup> Focus on Today

We all spend so much time thinking about everything, but the day we have in front of us. Don't worry about yesterday, tomorrow, or forever. You'll get lost in feelings of never being able to smoke again if you look back with longing or ahead with fear.

Your power to affect change in your life *always* lies in the here and now, so focus your sights on *today* and resolve to make the most of it. You have the ability to stay smoke-free just for today, don't you? That's all you need to do. Baby steps.

Healing from nicotine addiction is a process of gradual release that happens one day at a time. Be patient with yourself and allow recovery to unfold for you as it will. Enjoy the journey, and be sure to use the precious moments of *today* to the best of your ability.

## 2 Sources

Verywell Mind uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial process to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

1. National Cancer Institute. Tips for Coping With Nicotine Withdrawal and Triggers.
2. Shaheen NA, Alqahtani AA, Assiri H, Alkhodair R, Hussein MA. Public knowledge of dehydration and fluid intake practices: variation by participants' characteristics. *BMC Public Health*. 2018;18:1346.