

# Smoking and mental illness

Smoking rates among people with a mental illness are high. There are many reasons for this, such as smoking to cope with stress and anxiety. However, studies have shown that many people with a mental illness want to quit and that smoking causes, rather than relieves stress<sup>1</sup>.

## Reasons to quit

Becoming smoke free gives you so much to look forward to, including:

### Better health

Smoking has a major negative impact on your physical health. As soon as you quit you will start to see improvements.

- In 8 hours** Excess carbon monoxide is out of your blood.
- In 5 days** Most nicotine is out of your body.
- In 1 week** Your sense of taste and smell improves.
- In 1 month** Your immune system starts to recover and you are less vulnerable to disease.
- In 3 months** Your lungs regain the ability to clean themselves.
- In 12 months** Your risk of heart disease caused by smoking has halved.
- In 5 years** Your risk of a stroke has dramatically decreased.

### More money to spare

Think of how much money you spend on cigarettes every day, week, month or year. The money you save by not smoking can be spent on rewards or contribute towards rent, bills, private health insurance, new clothes or holidays. In one year, a packet-a-day smoker will save up to \$4,000.

An easy way to see how much money can be saved by quitting smoking is to use an online calculator. Go to [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au) and try the **Quit Now Calculator** and learn how much money you can save by quitting.

### Improved self-esteem

Quitting smoking also means you will look, feel and smell better – which can help you feel proud of yourself and improve your self-esteem.

## Going smoke free

### Identify your smoking triggers

What tempts you to smoke? Triggers may include:

- being with other smokers
- socialising and alcohol
- drinking coffee
- feeling bored
- feeling stressed.

### Find alternatives to smoking

Some alternatives may include:

- chewing nicotine gum or using another nicotine replacement product (it's important to check with your doctor before using these)
- if coffee is a trigger, consider drinking tea, orange juice or water
- if you're bored, perhaps phone someone or go for a walk
- put an elastic band around your cigarette packet, so it is harder to open. This will delay you smoking and give you time to think about doing something else instead.

Or try the 4Ds:

- **Delay** Delay for a few minutes, the urge to smoke will pass.
- **Deep breathe** Breathe slowly and deeply.
- **Do something else** Ring a friend or do some exercise to distract yourself.
- **Drink water** Take 'time out' and sip slowly to keep your hands and mouth occupied.

### Coping with withdrawal symptoms

Nicotine is addictive, so withdrawal symptoms are likely. These may include coughing, restlessness, difficulty sleeping and concentrating, and feeling irritable, anxious or angry. Symptoms will get easier after a few days and disappear in a few weeks. Remember these feelings are a normal reaction to nicotine withdrawal. Try to think positively but if you are concerned talk with your supporter, health worker or doctor. You can also talk with your doctor or specialist about nicotine replacement therapy and other quitting medications that may help with withdrawal symptoms.

### Dealing with stress

Some people worry that the stress of quitting smoking will trigger a relapse of their mental illness. This is unlikely to happen but talk to your doctor or smoke-free supporter to plan ways to deal with this concern. Be ready for stress by learning healthy ways of coping, such as:

- try to be active – walks, swim, ride a bike
- work on good sleeping habits
- talk things over with your smoke-free supporter
- practise deep breathing.

### Dealing with boredom

Boredom may tempt you to smoke, so it's important to develop ways to avoid this. Suggestions include:

- if you find it hard to get out of bed, ask someone to ring to help you wake up and get active
- do some art, listen to music or play a game
- join a course or group at your local neighbourhood house or other community centre.

## Set your quit goals

Set goals that are right for you. When you achieve them you can reward yourself. If you don't achieve them, look at what obstacles are stopping you from setting more achievable goals. Be realistic, allow for those days when you don't feel so good. Make a quitting contract with yourself and involve your smoke-free supporter if this will help.

Smoking is a powerful addiction and you should not be discouraged if you have trouble staying quit. Quitting can

be hard, and many smokers try several times before they succeed in quitting and staying quit, so try again.

## Stay in control

Stick with your quitting strategies to stay smoke free for good. While slip-ups may happen, recognise situations that may trigger reaching for a cigarette so you are ready with a response:

- feeling sad, angry, stressed or bad about yourself – plan strategies to cope or talk to your doctor or counsellor. Remember these feelings can also be signs of nicotine withdrawal
- dealing with conflict – leave the situation, change tactics or practise being assertive
- dealing with triggers – plan ahead, avoid alcohol, say no to cigarettes, ask friends for help.

## Find a supporter

It often helps to ask a friend or key person in your life, if they could offer some support to help you quit. There is a fact sheet on 'supporting someone with a mental illness to quit smoking' at [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au)

## Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)

NRT is a therapeutic aid for the purpose of quitting smoking. It is important to talk to your doctor before starting NRT because of potential side-effects and possible interactions with other medications you may be taking. NRT is available at a reduced price for eligible patients through the PBS with a prescription from a General Practitioner (GP) or specialist. More information is available at [www.pbs.gov.au](http://www.pbs.gov.au).

1. Ragg, M & Ahmed, T. 2008. *Smoke and Mirrors: a review of the literature on smoking and mental illness*. Tackling Tobacco Program Research Series No 1, Cancer Council NSW.

## Some useful resources

### Quitline

Quitline is a confidential telephone service that provides information, advice or counselling services for people who want to quit smoking. You can phone the Quitline on **13 7848** from anywhere in Australia for the cost of a local call.

Quitline counsellors have received special training in dealing with people with a mental illness.

When you call the Quitline you can arrange to have the 'Quit Book' mailed to you and if you want to talk to someone about quitting, they will give you information on:

- the best way for you to quit
- coping with withdrawal symptoms
- Quit courses and details of local organisations which provide individual help and counselling.

### Online motivation

The **Quit Now Calculator** allows you to select a savings goal and calculates the amount currently spent on smoking and the time it would take to reach the savings goal if you stopped smoking. Available at [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au) and can be linked to other websites or intranets.

### An app to help you quit

The Quit Now: **My QuitBuddy** is a personalised interactive app with quit tips, daily motivational messages and countdown to quitting reminders. The user records their goals in pictures, words or audio messages and can use the 'Back Me Up' button for a range of distractions when they get a craving. Call the Quitline **13 7848** or a buddy from the app, or post a note on the community board. Download **My QuitBuddy** free on an iPhone or iPad from iTunes.

## Congratulations on starting your journey to a smoke-free life.

Quitting is hard at the beginning but will get easier with every step. Everyone has to deal with the temporary effects of quitting, such as stress and withdrawal symptoms. When you have a mental illness there can be the extra worry of whether it will affect your mental health. It's important you deal with these worries by preparing yourself.



Ask a family member, friend or health worker to be your smoke-free supporter to regularly encourage you throughout your journey.



Focus on feeling good about yourself and thinking and talking positively.



Talk to your doctor about quit smoking medications – including nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) – and any impact smoking or quitting may have on your mental health medication.

For more information visit [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au) or [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

For more information on quitting talk to, or visit, your doctor or health professional, phone the Quitline on 13 7848 or go to [www.sane.org/information](http://www.sane.org/information).



Australian Government  
Department of Health and Ageing



 **Quitline 13 7848**  
[australia.gov.au/quitnow](http://australia.gov.au/quitnow)

The Department of Health and Ageing, in partnership with SANE Australia, has developed this fact sheet. Most information has been derived from SANE Australia documents.



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## Guide to a smoke-free life



**EVERY CIGARETTE YOU DON'T SMOKE IS DOING YOU GOOD**