

Concerns about weight gain

Will I gain weight?

Some people put off the decision to give up smoking because they worry about putting on weight. Some people do put on weight, but this is usually only a few pounds. A lot depends on what you do when you stop smoking. Not everyone gains weight, and some actually lose weight.

Why do some people gain weight when they stop smoking?

- Nicotine suppresses your natural appetite and makes your body burn calories faster. When you stop smoking, your metabolism begins to adjust back to its natural level, so less calories are used up. This is roughly equal to 200 calories a day, which is less than a bag of crisps! Remember, by raising your metabolism to an abnormal rate, smoking puts unnatural pressure on your heart.
- Smoking affects your sense of taste and smell, so food seems tastier when you stop.
- Sometimes people replace cigarettes with snacks and sweets or change their normal diet. This might be because they miss having something in their hands and mouth, have cravings for sweet food, or experience a restless/empty feeling which is easy to confuse with hunger.

So if I keep smoking, I won't put on weight?

Continuing to smoke is also no guarantee of a 'slim future'. With age, smokers tend to become less mobile and are able to take less aerobic exercise, so they don't use as much energy. Unless they eat less, they also tend to gain weight even though they continue to smoke. Smoking also causes cellulite!

Isn't weight gain unhealthy as well?

It is estimated that you'd need to gain 75 pounds (over 5 stone) to equal the serious risks posed by continuing smoking. The benefits to your health of stopping smoking far outweigh any costs.

What can I do if I'm worried about weight gain?

If you want to avoid weight gain, the key is to prepare. A combination of more activity and a healthy diet can help minimise weight changes. Remember, heavy smokers only burn around 200 extra calories a day, so cutting out one bag of crisps, or walking a bit extra can help make up the difference.

It makes sense to eat well from the start. Steer clear of high calorie and fried foods, and avoid snacking on sweets – that way you'll avoid habits like eating chocolate instead of smoking a cigarette.

Keeping active can also help control weight. Exercise has also been shown to help people quit smoking, and can help improve your mood by releasing good chemicals in your brain. Exercise doesn't need to be complicated – try taking the stairs instead of the lift, or get off the bus a stop or two early. Go for a 5 minute walk to beat your craving for a cigarette.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) can help reduce weight-gain while you are taking it, as some nicotine is kept in your system. Oral types of NRT might be useful to keep your mouth 'busy' too!

When you have a craving for something sweet, try a piece of fruit, which has natural sugars. There is some evidence that Glucose tablets (dextrose) can help with cravings and possibly weight. Ingesting one tablet an hour (1 packet a day) can help regulate glucose levels, however this is not recommended if you are diabetic or pregnant. Frequent, small meals are another way to help stabilise your blood sugar.

Remember that once you've stopped smoking, you'll find it easier to be active and lose any extra weight!

The tips on the next page are recommended for good all-round health in adult life.

Tips to keep healthy

Watch what you eat

Foods that are eaten as close to their natural state as possible are likely to be lower in calories and will also help your body flush out toxins and get back to its natural state more quickly (e.g. fruit & veg, and plenty of water). In the early days, try to go easy on fatty foods such as chips, chocolate and crisps, but don't be too hard on yourself. The odd bag of chips or a chocolate bar is much better than smoking, and once you're used to not smoking, you won't find it hard to shed a few pounds. If you can stop smoking, you can do anything!

Keeping your mouth busy!

- Slowly sip cold water or juice. As well as keeping your mouth busy, the vitamin C in juice may also reduce craving.
- Keep sugar-free gum and low calorie mints handy. These are great if you miss something in your mouth.

Opt for low-fat snacks for when you are hungry

- Stock up on low-calorie nibbles such as carrots, celery or apples
- Try fruit, crispbread or sugar-free lollipops in the first few weeks
- Rice cakes are also good for munching on

Get more active

- Exercise has been shown to help people quit smoking- it decreases withdrawal symptoms and cravings both during exercise and up to 50 minutes after! Visit www.everydayhealth.com/smoking-cessation/living/exercise-can-help-you-quit-smoking.aspx
- Walk instead of driving or taking the bus- or get off the bus 2 stops early
- Use the stairs instead of the lift

Some other healthy diet tips

- Watch your alcohol intake. Alcohol is high in calories, and depletes vitamins - it can also be a trigger to smoke
- Eat plenty of fresh fruit and salads
- Grilled fish and poultry with lemon juice and herbs
- Steamed green vegetables
- Fruit and herbal teas
- Drink 2 litres of water a day

Choose lower fat foods

- Go for semi-skimmed or skimmed milk
- Investigate low-fat dairy products and spreads
- Go easy on the cheese - and choose low or medium fat types. Try a portion of hard cheese (the size of a matchbox)- grate it to make it go further
- Cut down on fatty snacks like crisps, processed nuts, and some 'health bars' & 'breakfast bars'

Prepare foods with less fat

- Trim excess fat off meat
- Grill, bake or steam food rather than frying, or use minimal fat
- Go easy on dressings and sauces

Fill up on fruit, vegetables and starches

- Choose wholegrain bread, pasta and cereal foods if possible
- Remember that juice, dried fruit, and canned fruit also count towards your 'five portions a day'
- Look for fruit canned in juice rather than syrup

Adapted from 'The Really Helpful Guide to Running Stop Smoking Sessions: ASH in Wales, 2001'