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SMOKE-FREE & FIT Weight Management After Quitting Smoking

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Congratulations! You have decided to take a very important step towards improving your overall health and reducing your risks of certain diseases and cancers. You might have heard about weight gain being a side effect of quitting smoking. This is true in some cases, although not everyone who quits smoking gains weight. This brochure will answer questions you may have concerning weight gain.

WHY DOES WEIGHT GAIN OFTEN FOLLOW SMOKING CESSATION?

The exact reason isn't known; but most evidence points to nicotine, which is a strong poison. Nicotine makes the body work harder and use more energy in order to function. The harder the body works, the more calories it burns. This results in a lower weight. Some scientists speculate that the weight we return to after quitting smoking is the weight we would have been if we never smoked. So it is not really a "gain," but actually a return to our "normal" weight--the weight we would be if we had never smoked.

Some studies have also shown that total calorie intake does increase in the first few smoke-free weeks. This is usually a short-term response, generally due to snacking. Studies show that nicotine plays a role in suppressing the urge to snack. Also, weight gain may be part of the body's physiological response to nicotine withdrawal.

HOW DO I DEAL WITH A WEIGHT GAIN?

Although a concern with weight gain is valid, the average weight gain after quitting is far less risky to your health than continuing to smoke. At first, your goal should be to stay smoke-free. Studies show that those who anticipate and accept the weight gain as temporary, rather than try to prevent it, are more successful in their efforts to quit smoking. Also, former smokers do not continue to gain weight at a higher rate than those who never smoked. It is important to note that people who continue to smoke do gain weight over time, and smoking is not effective at preventing weight gain. Smokers tend to add pounds in the abdominal area, which is the most dangerous form of weight gain.

People who are concerned about their weight actually seem to have better success with quitting smoking. This may reflect a positive health-conscious attitude. It is thought that these concerns reflect a more realistic approach to quitting smoking by preparing the person for the challenge of smoking cessation.

Don't attempt too many changes at one time. The key to success in quitting smoking is to make one change at a time. As a non-smoker, the weight gain will be easier to deal with.

DON'T GET DISCOURAGED

Smoking cessation has major and immediate health benefits for men and women of all ages. These benefits far outweigh the average weight gain of 5 to 10 pounds. You would have to gain 100 pounds to equal the risk associated with smoking.

About 80 percent of those who quit smoking do gain some weight. Most of the gain occurs in the first few weeks and then levels off after six months.

Sure, physical appearance is important to most of us. However, a small gain in weight may not hurt your appearance as much as continuing to smoke. Smoking is unattractive, causing yellow teeth, bad breath, stale clothing odors, and wrinkled skin, making you look older than your age.

THE "RIGHT" TIME TO DIET

There are different stages in the quitting process. It is thought that starting a restrictive diet interferes with cessation efforts. This is because the mental and emotional demands of "dieting" can interfere with the concentration needed to maintain abstinence from smoking.

It may be useful to give yourself a specific period of time, such as six months, to concentrate on staying smoke-free. That is the amount of time when any weight gain that has occurred tends to level off. Studies show that over time weight tends to come back down. Resuming smoking is not associated with weight loss.



WHAT ABOUT NICOTINE GUM?

There is some evidence that persons who use nicotine gum gain less weight after cessation than those who do not. In some cases, the gum has been shown to improve smoking cessation rates. It's best to discuss with your physician whether nicotine gum is appropriate for you.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Increase your physical activity. You will have more energy now that your lungs are bringing in clean air instead of smoke. Exercise decreases your stress level and helps you maintain a healthy weight.

When the urge to smoke hits you, take a short walk, work in the garden or clean out that closet you've been meaning to get to. Any physical exercise is an effective technique to cope with withdrawal from cigarettes and to avoid weight gain.

Not every person who quits smoking gains weight. If a weight gain does occur, it usually is temporary. Don't diet now; there will be time after you are an established non-smoker. Concentrate on not smoking for about six months before you focus on weight loss.

Permanent lifestyle changes such as eating more fruits and vegetables, increasing your physical activity and avoiding overindulgence in high-fat, high-calorie foods will help you remain at a healthy weight. There is no such thing as a "bad" food, if eaten in moderation.

Remember, alcohol stimulates the appetite. Besides making you hungry, it has little nutritional value. It may also weaken your resolve to stay smoke-free.

You may want to talk to a Registered Dietitian about helping you set up a food and exercise plan. They have been trained to take lifestyle, food preferences and caloric needs into account in order to help you manage your weight in the most healthy way possible.

Changes made gradually are the ones that become permanent. Replace old habits with new ones over time. Try not to make a lot of changes all at once. The health benefits of being smoke-free can reduce the risk of many diseases and improve your quality of life now and in the future. You have made the right decision!!

Health and Nutrition: Smoking

- [Smoke-Free & Fit - Breaking the Barriers](#)
- [Smoke-Free & Fit - Goal Setting and Preparing To Quit](#)
- [Smoke-Free and Fit - Weight Management After Quitting Smoking](#)
- [Smoke-Free & Fit - Eat For Good Health](#)

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