

Ending tobacco dependence

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease and preventable death in the United States. Yet millions continue to smoke.

Kicking the habit is made more difficult by the physical addiction to **nicotine** (the chemical stimulant in tobacco). Nicotine is a highly addictive drug that causes strong physical cravings and withdrawal symptoms like other drugs that stimulate the nervous system. Fortunately, medical treatments are now available that can help you control the withdrawal symptoms and cravings.

There are also psychological and behavioral factors that make it more

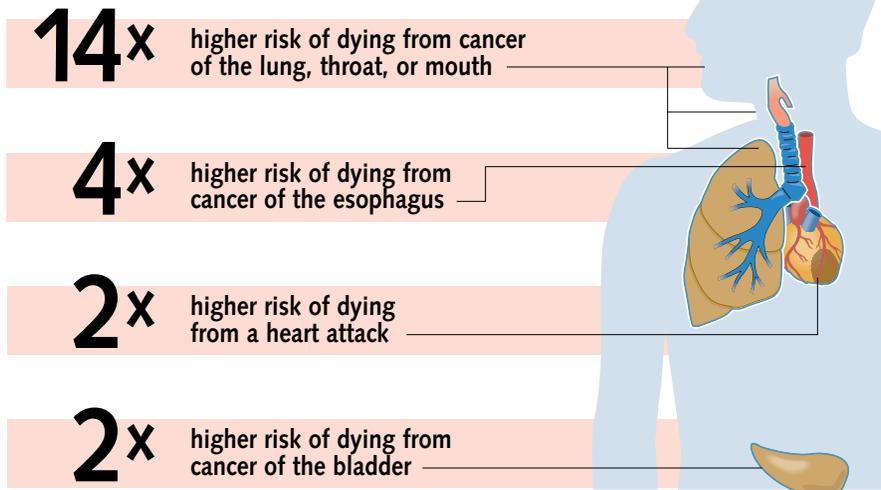
difficult to stop smoking. You may smoke when you become nervous, when you drink alcohol, or when you're on the phone, for example. Your doctor can help you successfully quit smoking by treating your addiction to nicotine and by giving you information on how to change your behavior.

If you are ready to quit, talk to your physician. He or she can help you choose the best method of quitting for you. An article in the September 1, 1999, issue of *JAMA* stresses the importance of **smoking cessation** (ways to stop smoking) as part of training for medical students.

WHY YOU SHOULD QUIT:

More than 40 chemicals in tobacco smoke have been identified to cause cancer. Smoking also damages your lungs and other parts of your respiratory system, raises your blood pressure, and robs your body of oxygen, just to name a few of its harmful effects.

The average smoker is at a:



Source: AMA's Family Medical Guide

Additional Sources: National Cancer Institute, AMA's Family Medical Guide, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS:

The most important factors for success are being strongly motivated to quit and making a firm commitment to quit.

To increase your chances of success:

- Get help from your doctor (he or she can help you choose an effective method or combination of methods to make quitting easier.)
- Set a firm date to quit
- Start to cut back before your quit day
- Let friends and family know you are quitting (this will provide motivation for you and allow them the opportunity to give you emotional support.)
- Have realistic expectations (you should realize quitting won't be easy and that you may have some temporary setbacks.)
- Change your habits to avoid situations that trigger tobacco use (For example, drink less alcohol and coffee, avoid other smokers, and avoid situations and places where you are likely to smoke.)
- Join a support group of ex-smokers

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Cancer Institute
Clearing the Air: How to Quit Smoking and Quit for Keeps
800/4-CANCER
800/332-8615 (TTY) or
www.nci.nih.gov
- American Lung Association
Freedom From Smoking
800/LUNG-USA or www.lungusa.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm. A previous *JAMA* Patient Page on secondhand smoke was published on December 9, 1998.

