

Quitting Smoking Without Gaining Weight



California
Smokers'
Helpline

1-800-NO-BUTTS

Many people believe that quitting smoking means gaining weight. On average people gain 5 pounds when they quit. Some people gain more, some less. Some people have no weight change after quitting smoking. Read on for some information about how to avoid gaining weight when you quit smoking.

Smoking can change your metabolism.

Metabolism is the rate at which the body burns calories. A faster metabolism can make it easier to keep weight down. Nicotine is a stimulant that can speed up your metabolism artificially. When you quit smoking, your metabolism slows down, returning to its normal state, which could result in weight gain. You can raise your metabolism naturally by increasing your physical activities and eating healthy meals and snacks.

You could find yourself eating more.

Because you've just quit a hand-to-mouth habit, you could find yourself substituting food for cigarettes. That means that if you smoked, say, 20 cigarettes a day, you could be in trouble if you eat that many times a day. Try substituting a hand-to-mouth habit that is low in calories, like toothpicks, straws, carrot sticks, or drinking bottled water. Also, many people find they crave sweets more often after they quit smoking. Limit the amount of sweets you eat, or try sweets that are lower in fat, such as hard candy, gum, or an apple.

Get out for a walk. Or run, or dance, or garden, or play with your dog or kids, or whatever you like to do that's active. Try the stairs if you can. Park further away from the store. Activity burns calories. Check with your doctor if you're not sure about what level of activity is best for you.

Drink water. Water fills you up, so you won't be hungry as often. Also, water flushes toxins out of your body and helps you keep weight off naturally. Try to drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day (8 oz.). Using a water bottle will help you remember.

Eat only when you're hungry. Before you eat, ask yourself if you're actually hungry, or if you're just eating because the food is there, or because you're restless. Often when people quit smoking they mistake nicotine cravings for hunger pangs. Is it a normal time for you to be hungry, or are you just having a craving for a cigarette? If you're craving a cigarette, get out those coping strategies.



Eat healthy. Avoid the temptation of fast food—it's very high in fat and calories. One fast food meal contains more fat grams than you need for the whole day. Generally, avoid fried foods and food like soups and pastas that are loaded with fattening cream sauce.

Stock up on low fat foods, and stick to the ones that you like and will actually eat.

Make your meals interesting. Vary the foods you eat—don't have the same old things all the time. You can still eat foods from all of the food groups; just choose them with care. Milk and dairy products should be nonfat or very lowfat (1%). For meats, make lean choices like turkey and chicken breast. Be aware of how much oil you're using; salads are great, but dressing can make the fat calories skyrocket, so use them sparingly. And start strong—people who eat a healthy breakfast generally feel less hungry throughout the day.

Be patient with yourself. Weight control is a learned behavior—food habits and activities have developed over your lifetime. It may take a while for your new eating habits to stick, but they will become more natural with time. Doing what you can each day to give your body good food and a healthy dose of activity will help keep your weight in check as you quit smoking.