Smoking & tobacco

Facts about smoking

How people get addicted

Nicotine is one of the main ingredients in tobacco. Nicotine is a powerful drug that speeds up the brain and central nervous system. It triggers the release of a chemical in your brain (dopamine) that boosts your mood, makes you feel calm, and at the same time, can make you feel more alert. The nicotine in cigarette smoke is absorbed through the skin lining of the mouth and the nose. The nicotine level in your blood peaks within 10 seconds of inhaling (breathing in) cigarette smoke into your lungs.

Over time, your brain adjusts to the stimulation ("buzz") from nicotine and lowers your natural energy level or mood. You may then start to crave a cigarette for a boost. The more you smoke the more nicotine you need to feel good. Soon, your body craves nicotine to feel "normal." Being without nicotine for even a few hours can cause withdrawal symptoms like headaches, depression, anger, anxiety, and problems sleeping.

Withdrawal symptoms last about a week for most people. You can cope with them by knowing what to expect and finding other ways to handle cravings before you quit. Withdrawal symptoms are a sign that your body is healing. They won't last forever.

How behaviour feeds nicotine addition

The other part of nicotine addiction is behaviour. After months or years of smoking, cigarettes become a part of your daily life. You may light a cigarette out of habit as soon as you get into the car or when you drink a cup of coffee.

Smoking habits can also be formed by the way you feel - many smokers reach for a cigarette when they feel bored, stressed or angry. Even if you have been smoking for many years, you can learn to live without cigarettes. But it takes practice. It's important to know your triggers and plan how you will deal with each of them before you quit.

Fast facts about nicotine

- Nicotine is an addictive drug that affects the brain and nervous system. At higher doses, nicotine is a poison that has been used as an insecticide
- Nicotine has a powerful effect on the brain and the central nervous system
- Within seven seconds, about one-quarter of the nicotine has gone through your bloodstream straight to the brain. The rest of the nicotine travels to other areas of the body
- Nicotine causes a rise in heart rate and in the rate of breathing
- Nicotine increases the tendency of the blood to clot and causes an increased need for oxygen, which makes the heart work harder.