

Women and Smoking

Traditional approaches to helping people quit treat the nicotine addiction of men and women in the same way. While it's true that the process of quitting, coping strategies, and general health effects are common to both sexes, there are differences in how to treat the needs of a male or female who wants to quit smoking.

Three Reasons Quitting is Different for Men and Women:

1. *Emotional* – More often, women smoke to deal with stress and suppress anger due to frequent stress. Most have multiple jobs, as wives, mothers, helpers, or sole supporters.
2. *Biological* – A woman's body tends to process nicotine more slowly than a man's. Cigarette for cigarette, women have higher levels of nicotine than men, and may become more dependent on the nicotine.
3. *Social* – Cigarette ads are very common in the United States. Tobacco companies directly and deliberately target women, particularly young women, in their ads. Women are constantly reminded that somehow they are not quite good enough. Just add a cigarette, a new deodorant, or hair color and it is a "better you."

Two Tips for Women

Common strategies for quitting that work for both men and women should be included in your quit plan: learning about your addiction, finding out why you smoke, identifying coping strategies, becoming aware of high-risk situations, asking friends to help, and setting your quit date. There are two other strategies that women can consider when planning to quit:

- *Time your cessation effort with stage of the menstrual cycle* – research shows that withdrawal symptoms are worse in the latter part of the cycle and during your period. Therefore, you may want to try to stop at the end of your period to experience less intense withdrawal symptoms.
- *Reduce your caffeine intake by half* – smoking actually decreases caffeine's effect, so when you quit, if you don't cut back on caffeinated beverages, you may experience caffeine overdose causing irritability, nervousness, and tension.

Smoking and Pregnancy

The day the test comes back positive can be a day of joy, or a day of anxiety and distress. Ready or not for the promise of a new child, many women who smoke will find it extremely difficult to quit. Smoking causes a pregnancy to be high risk. Below you will find information to help you understand effects of smoking on your body.

- Make every effort to quit. See your family doctor and enlist the help of a support person.
- Reduce your exposure to other smokers; make your home smoke-free.
- Eat well; consult with a nutritionist or your family doctor.
- Making rooms in your home smoke-free will not remove the risk from environmental tobacco smoke. Your furnace or air conditioning recycles air throughout the house, from all rooms.

Smoking and The Pill

Many young women think the negative side effects of smoking and taking oral contraceptives is something that happens to older women. "I'm not worried about that. I'll quit before I get any of those diseases or problems you hear about," says Jennifer, a 21-year-old student.

The birth control pill may increase your chances for serious heart disease and high blood pressure, especially if you smoke.

What Happens to Your Body

- When you smoke, carbon monoxide—the colorless, odorless, deadly gas present in car exhaust—passes immediately into your blood. Carbon monoxide binds to the oxygen receptor sites and “kicks out” the oxygen molecules in your red blood cells.
- Hemoglobin—the protein that feeds oxygen to organs, tissues, and cells—is bound to the carbon monoxide and can no longer carry oxygen. This means there’s less oxygen for energy; less oxygen means less energy.
- At the same time, your body receives a dose of nicotine. Nicotine increases your heart rate—as much as 10 to 15 beats per minute—requiring more oxygen. If you’re pregnant, less oxygen reaches the fetus to help it grow and develop.
- As you continue to smoke, your body responds to the low oxygen levels by producing changes that can put you at risk of blood clots and heart disease.
- Women with osteoporosis seem to be at higher risk of bone thinning if they smoke. Smoking apparently increases the rate of breakdown of estrogen, a hormone that helps protect women against osteoporosis. Slender women are at greater risk because fat cells produce a small amount of estrogen.

Alarming Trends in the Nineties Are...

We have seen a steady increase in heart disease among women. Smoking is the number one factor that has caused this increase. Smoking causes increased blood clotting, high levels of catecholamines—substances that narrow arteries and limit blood flow, increased heart rate—so your heart is working harder with less oxygen to feed it, increased irritability of the electrical conducting system of the heart, and high blood pressure.

The Good News is...

Within one year of stopping, about half the risk of heart disease is eliminated and within 15 years, the heart disease risk for former smokers is about the same as those who have never smoked.