



# Cancer Treatment Feel Good—Quit Smoking



## Quit smoking

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to help your cancer treatment. Quitting smoking also reduces the chance of your cancer coming back or getting another form of cancer. Whether you are scheduled to have surgery, radiation treatment or chemotherapy, quitting smoking will help you.

### Radiation therapy

- Radiation therapy works better if the level of oxygen in your body is normal. When you smoke, the level of oxygen in your blood drops, making it harder for radiation to do its job.
- If you can't stop smoking, avoid smoking before and after your radiation therapy.

### Chemotherapy

- Chemotherapy drugs work better in people who don't smoke.
- Smoke has chemicals in it that reduce the blood level of some chemotherapy drugs, making them less effective.

### Surgery

- Quitting smoking or reducing the number of cigarettes you smoke can make surgery safer and help you recover more quickly. If possible, try to quit at least 6 to 8 weeks before your operation. But quitting at any time is helpful.
- People who don't smoke:
  - are less likely to have complications during or after their surgery
  - are less likely to develop infections and are more likely to heal quickly
  - may get better faster and go home sooner

## Other important benefits of quitting

- It reduces the chances of your cancer coming back or getting another form of cancer.
- It helps you feel better:
  - within 20 minutes of your last cigarette, your heart rate and blood pressure will begin to drop
  - within 2 days your lungs and heart will be healthier
  - within 3 months, your lung function will be better
  - in 1 year, your risk of heart disease is cut in half

## How you can do it

The best way to quit smoking is using both counselling and medication, which can triple the chance of success. Start by talking to:

- Your cancer care team, including your psychosocial counsellor—ask about quit-smoking services or counselling.
- Your family doctor or nurse practitioner.
- Your pharmacist.
- Your local public health unit (look in the phone book for their number or ask your cancer care team).
- A Quit Coach at Smokers' Helpline at **1-877-513-5333** or the number on cigarette packages.
- A community of other quitters on Smokers' Helpline online: [smokershelpline.ca](http://smokershelpline.ca).

### Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)

- NRT comes in many forms, including patches, gum, lozenges, mouth spray and inhalers.
- Using NRT can double your chances of quitting by reducing nicotine cravings and withdrawal symptoms.
- NRT is sold in pharmacies and some stores. You do not need a prescription. If the cost is an issue, talk to your healthcare provider, public health unit or the Smokers' Helpline to see if there are programs to help you.
- Talk with your healthcare provider if you want to try NRT. They can help you learn how to use it or look at ways to make it work better.



- The cost of NRT is less than what it costs to smoke. Some private insurance or benefit plans will pay for your NRT, such as the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program for First Nations.

## Non-nicotine prescription medications

- Two prescription drugs are available to help reduce nicotine cravings and prevent relapse: varenicline (Champix®) and bupropion (Zyban®).
- These drugs require a prescription from a doctor, nurse practitioner or pharmacist.
- These prescription medications may be available to you at no cost if you are on the Ontario Drug Benefit plan or the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program for First Nations.
- Talk with your healthcare provider to see if these medications may be helpful for you.

## Counselling

- Some people find it helpful to meet with a quit-smoking counsellor or coach in person or by phone.
- Ask about quit-smoking programs or services at your cancer treatment centre or hospital.
- Another option is joining a quit smoking group, in person or online.
- Quit lines, such as Smokers' Helpline more than double the chance of quitting.
- To find a quit-smoking counsellor or group in your community, call the Smokers' Helpline, at 1-877-513-5333.

## Self-help guides

- You can get self-help brochures and fact sheets from:
  - your cancer care team
  - smokers' helpline quit coaches (1-877-513-5333) or smokers' helpline online at: [smokershelpline.ca](http://smokershelpline.ca).

## Tell your healthcare team if you're trying to quit. Your medication needs may change when you quit.

Some people may use acupuncture, laser therapy, hypnosis, herbal remedies or e-cigarettes to quit smoking. At this time there is little research to show whether these methods are safe or really work.

## Tips to help you quit

### The 4 Ds

You can learn how to avoid tobacco by using the 4 Ds:

- **Delay.** Cravings often go away within 3 to 5 minutes so try to wait it out.
- **Drink water.** Instead of reaching for tobacco, reach for a glass of cold water.
- **Distract.** Find something to keep your mind and hands busy.
- **Deep breathing.** It can help you relax and push away the urge to smoke.

### Don't give up and don't be hard on yourself

Smoking is an addiction and something you may do as part of your daily routine. It's common for people to have slip-ups. Don't give up and don't be hard on yourself. If you do slip up:

- **Change the situation.** Avoid or leave places or situations you connect with smoking.
- **Think positively.** Think about how far you've come and do your best to keep going.
- **Take action.** Do something that makes it hard to smoke. For example, chew gum, drink some water, or go for a walk.
- **Ask for help.** Talk to a friend, family member or your cancer care team.
- **Don't quit quitting.** Quitting is possible and you can do it.



CREDIT: Artwork by Mike Ormsby used under license grant from W'DAE B'WAE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY (THROUGH CANOE)

Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 30 inches  
Painted in 2015  
© Mike Ormsby

Cancer Care Ontario (CCO) is an organization committed to ensuring accessible services and communications to individuals with disabilities. To receive any part of this document in an alternate format, please contact CCO's Communications Department at 1-855-460-2647, TTY (416) 217-1815, or [publicaffairs@cancercare.on.ca](mailto:publicaffairs@cancercare.on.ca).