



Lose Weight and Quit Tobacco—You Can Do Both!



Some Veterans continue to use tobacco because they are afraid they will gain weight if they stop. It's true: People often do gain weight after quitting tobacco. But you don't have to!

In this mini-module, we'll show you some ways to make quitting tobacco easier. We'll also give you some tools to help you on your weight loss journey even after quitting, and we'll list some VA resources that can help you along the way.

VA Wants to Help You Quit Tobacco!

No doubt: Quitting tobacco is hard. But VA has more tobacco-cessation treatment options available than ever before!

Local VA health care providers—Veterans can talk with their primary care or mental health provider to learn about the FDA-approved medications and behavioral counseling options available. There may be programs available that are unique to your local VA Medical Center.

Quit VET—Veterans can speak with a tobacco cessation counselor and make a quit plan by calling **1-855-QUIT-VET** (1-855-784-8838). Quitline counselors are available between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday.

SmokefreeVET—Veterans can receive daily support and encouragement for those quitting tobacco. Veterans can text "**VET**" to **47848** or visit <http://smokefree.gov/VET> to get started.

Website—Veterans can visit <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/> to learn the benefits of quitting and available tobacco cessation resources and <https://smokefree.gov/veterans> for interactive online tools to help quit tobacco.

Stay Quit Coach—Veterans can download this app at <https://mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach> to receive the tools and information to quit smoking. It's available for free to download from the App Store and Android Apps.

Ways You Can Quit Tobacco—And Stay Quit

Quitting tobacco isn't easy, but you can do it. Consider this: There are more former tobacco users today than current tobacco users. Quitting takes practice. Even the most motivated person may try to quit five or more times before succeeding. Each time brings lessons learned. Just don't give up!

Counseling—A health care provider or counselor can also help you make behavioral changes to break free of tobacco. Tobacco cessation counseling involves talking about your tobacco use and the role it plays in your daily routine. You have the best chance of quitting when you combine this counseling with tobacco cessation medications.

One important aspect of counseling is identifying your triggers for tobacco use. These could include talking on the phone, drinking a cup of coffee, drinking alcohol, feeling bored, or needing a break. Counseling will help you figure out how you can avoid or cope with triggers like these so you don't relapse and start smoking again after you quit. For example: If you smoke with your morning coffee, your counselor may suggest drinking your coffee in a smoke-free environment, such as a restaurant or workplace kitchen, or switching to tea instead.

Medications—Research shows that a person has the best chance of quitting tobacco for good when they use medications to help reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms. If you want to quit using tobacco, talk with your VA health care team about these medications. Your primary care or mental health provider can suggest one or more medications to help you quit. Treatments include:

- Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT).
 - Nicotine patch
 - Nicotine lozenge
 - Nicotine gum
- Bupropion (Zyban[®], Wellbutrin[®])
- Varenicline (Chantix[®])

Nicotine is the addictive substance in tobacco and NRT medicines deliver nicotine without the other harmful components found in tobacco products to reduce withdrawal symptoms. Nicotine from NRT is delivered more slowly, making it less addictive, and you gradually reduce the level of nicotine over time until you no longer need it. Bupropion and varenicline are prescription medications that do not provide nicotine, but reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

Often, a combination of two or more of these medications works the best. Your health care team will use your medical history and talk with you to decide what approach may work best for you. You can learn more and explore medication options in this online, interactive NRT explorer: <https://smoke-free.gov/veterans/tools-help-you-quit/quit-for-good-with-nrt>



Other things you can do to quit—You can set yourself up to succeed by preparing before your quit date. Keep these tips in mind as you prepare to and then actually stop using tobacco.

- *Get support from others*—Family and friends can be your best allies in the fight to stop using tobacco. Let them know you're quitting and ask friends who are tobacco-users not to use tobacco around you.
- *Get rid of all tobacco, ashtrays, e-cigarettes, vape pens, and lighters before your quit day*—These can all be triggers to start using tobacco again. Remove these from your car as well.
- *Use tobacco substitutes*—Sugar-free gum and mints, crunchy veggies like carrots or celery sticks, and even toothpicks, straws, and cinnamon sticks can all help you get past a craving. The average craving goes away in 3-5 minutes, so a substitute can help get you through that time.
- *Change your routine*—Starting on your quit day, make some changes to your daily grind. For example, get up at a different time, drink your coffee out of a new mug, or drive to work via a different route. Small changes like these can help break old routines and trigger the mindset that "it's a new day!"
- *Plan activities to replace tobacco use*—Taking a walk, meditating, reading, or enjoying a favorite hobby: All these can fill time you used to spend smoking or using tobacco. If you often smoked after meals, replace that with brushing your teeth or even a healthy dessert.



Quitting Tobacco—A Healthy Lifestyle Choice!

The positive health effects of quitting tobacco far exceed the small effect tobacco can have on your weight. If you quit tobacco:

- You'll feel healthier and have fewer health problems.
- You'll be able to walk farther or play harder without becoming short of breath.
- You'll save money.
- Your sense of taste and smell will improve.
- Your clothes, car, and home will smell better.
- Your fingers and nails will lose the yellow stain.
- You'll reduce your risk of developing cavities.
- After just 1 year of living tobacco-free, your risk of heart disease drops by one-half.
- After 10-15 years, your risk of stroke or heart attack drops to about the same as a nonsmoker.
- What other benefits are you looking forward to? If you think of some that are not listed, make a note here: _____

Managing Your Weight Without Tobacco

Quitting tobacco can sometimes make it harder to lose weight. Fortunately, you already know how to manage your weight without tobacco! The same healthy lifestyle changes you are making with MOVE! can keep you losing weight even without tobacco.

Eat healthy—To keep losing weight after you quit, remind yourself of these healthy eating tips:

- Eat more vegetables and fruit. Fill up on these healthy choices!
- Avoid high-fat, high-sugar foods and beverages.
- Eat small meals 5 or 6 times a day, instead of 2 or 3 large meals.
- Eat very slowly and be mindful of your food. Completely enjoy every morsel!
- Eat at the table, not in front of the TV.
- Plan ahead. Bring your lunch rather than eating fast food.
- Keep healthy, crunchy snacks handy, such as carrot sticks, apples, and pretzels.
- Drink plenty of water to help you feel full.



Be active—The nicotine in tobacco can raise your metabolism. That's why getting and staying active is so important when you quit using tobacco. Being active boosts your metabolism and helps you burn more calories.

- Take walks, garden, go bicycling, swim, play active sports...whatever you enjoy. Remember that exercise and breathing become easier when you quit!
- Set a time each day to do some physical activity.
- It may be better to break activity into shorter amounts of times, two or three sessions per day.
- Make small changes that boost your activity during the workday, like parking farther from the office, taking the stairs, and getting up and moving every hour.
- Drink water to stay hydrated instead of sugary sports drinks.
- Manage urges to smoke or eat by taking a 5-minute activity break (for example, walk around the block).