

## **Weight gain and quitting smoking** <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I've been a smoker for eight years and now I want to quit smoking. But there's one thing that annoys me — I've heard that if one quits smoking, s/he will gain weight. Is it really true? Thanks in advance.

### **Answer**

Dear Reader,

To begin with, a note of congratulations on the first step toward becoming a nonsmoker. A strong personal resolve to kick the habit is a primary factor in quitting smoking successfully. Some people may gain weight when they stop smoking, and, for that reason, they may light up again. However, a normal, healthy person would have to gain close to a hundred pounds in order to equal the health risks s/he takes with smoking. Also, it is not a given that everyone who quits smoking gains weight. Regardless, you can strategize to fend off unwanted pounds.

So, why do some people gain weight when they quit smoking? Nicotine suppresses the appetite and causes the liver to release glycogen, which raises the blood sugar level slightly. With nicotine out of your system, you may feel hungry more often. Smoking artificially elevates heart rate and increases metabolism. When you stop smoking, your body has to readjust to a lower metabolic rate. If you eat the same as you did when you were smoking, your body will end up using less and storing more (as fat) of the food. Smoking dulls the taste buds. Food begins to taste better to new nonsmokers; this can increase food intake. And then there's oral fixation -- some ex-smokers may want something to fill the void of cigarettes.

Following a well-balanced, healthy diet will help you maintain your weight while quitting smoking. Obviously, if you substitute a candy bar each time you crave a cigarette, you will gain weight. Eating a low-calorie diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and increasing your activity level, will probably prove effective in maintaining your weight.

If you think this won't be enough, you can figure out your current average daily caloric intake and use this as a guideline for weight maintenance after you quit. Plan meals and shop ahead at first. Stock your kitchen and office with healthy, low-calorie snack foods, such as carrot and celery

sticks, air-popped popcorn, dry cereals, or crackers. Don't give yourself carte blanche with snack foods, however. View them as aids to getting beyond the craving to smoke. Other things that you can use to put in your mouth include toothpicks, plastic straws, gum, and hard candy.

Think about when you normally smoke and decide what you'll do instead. For instance, if you always have a cigarette with your coffee, plan to have something else on hand. If you find that the nonsmoking causes you to want to eat more at meals, drink a glass of water before and during the meal. Chew your food well, eat slowly, and concentrate on how much better food tastes now. After a meal is a great time for a cigarette, right? Well, then get up and moving right away — wash the dishes, go for a walk, brush your teeth.

Nicotine addiction can be monumentally difficult to overcome. Whatever your reasons for wanting to quit, know that there are many source of assistance. To start, your school or office may have smoking cessation groups and/or integrated practices. You might also take a look at the [Smokefree.gov](http://Smokefree.gov) [2] to locate more cessation resources.

Some additional sites that you might want to check out for more information include:

- [American Cancer Society](#) [3]
- [American Lung Association](#) [4]
- [National Cancer Institute](#) [5]

Best of luck to you and congratulations on wanting to quit!

Alice!

Category:

[Alcohol & Other Drugs](#) [6]

[Cigarettes, Chewing Tobacco, & Other Nicotine](#) [7]

## Related questions

[Quitting smoking = depression?](#) [8]

[Smokin' runner](#) [9]

[Smoking's effects on sex](#) [10]

[Are clove cigarettes as bad as regular cigarettes?](#) [11]

[Can't stop chewing Nicorette \(nicotine gum\)!](#) [12]

[Smoking withdrawal symptoms](#) [13]

## Resources

[Tobacco Cessation \(Morningside\)](#) [14]

[Medical Services \(Morningside\)](#) [15]

[Addiction Information & Management Strategies \(AIMS\) \(CUIMC\)](#) [16]

[Medical Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [17]

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## Footer menu

- ▼ Contact Alice!
  - Content Use
  - Media Inquiries
  - Comments & Corrections
- ▼ Syndication & Licensing
  - Licensing Q&As
  - Get Alice! on Your Website
  - Full Site Syndication
  - Link to Go Ask Alice!

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### Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/weight-gain-and-quitting-smoking>
- [2] <http://www.healthfinder.gov/scripts/SearchContext.asp?topic=801&refine=1>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.org/>
- [4] <http://www.lungusa.org>
- [5] <http://WWW.NCI.NIH.GOV/>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/cigarettes-chewing-tobacco-other-nicotine>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/quitting-smoking-depression>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/smokin-runner>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/smokings-effects-sex>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/are-clove-cigarettes-bad-regular-cigarettes>
- [12] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/cant-stop-chewing-nicorette-nicotine-gum>
- [13] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/smoking-withdrawal-symptoms>
- [14] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/tobacco-cessation-morningside>
- [15] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>
- [16] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/addiction-information-management-strategies-aims-cuimc>
- [17] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cuimc>