

Quit Smoking: An Attainable Goal

Dejar de fumar: un objetivo posible

EPIDEMIOLOGY

Smoking is a chronic condition caused by nicotine addiction and exposure to more than 7,000 toxic substances. It is the leading cause of avoidable diseases and premature death worldwide, with overall 10% mortality.

In Argentina, smoking rate is one of the highest in Latin America, although it is decreasing compared to previous years. Recent data from the 2013 National Survey on Risk Factors show that 25.1% of the adult population –1 out of 4 adults– smokes. Over 40,000 people die each year as a result of direct tobacco consumption, most of them due to cardiovascular and respiratory causes, and an estimated 6,000 non-smokers (called passive smokers) die from smoke exposure by living with smokers.

This can be extremely harmful, especially for small children who can suffer from sudden infant death, recurrent infections, and developmental disorders.

HOW DOES SMOKING AFFECT YOUR HEALTH?

Smoking is directly associated to serious diseases:

- Different types of cancer: lung, larynx, pharynx, kidney, liver, bladder, among others.
- Cardiovascular diseases: acute myocardial infarction, aortic aneurysm, stroke.
- Respiratory diseases: chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and recurrent respiratory infections.
- The female reproductive system is affected by smoking: sterility, pregnancy and neonatal complications.

Tobacco consumption is addictive, as once people start smoking, they become physically and psychologically dependent on tobacco, with the added aggravation that it is a socially acceptable addiction.

USEFUL RECOMMENDATIONS TO QUIT SMOKING

Very few smokers manage to quit on their own once the decision has been taken. If quitting is not possible, healthcare professionals can offer different options, such as cognitive behavioral therapy with or without medication that greatly improves the chances of quitting smoking. Quitting and keeping away from smoking is difficult, but not impossible. No treatment to quit smoking is effective without enough motivation.

These recommendations help to plan an effective strategy to reach your goal.

HOW TO START TREATMENT

Getting ready to quit smoking requires the following:

1. Make a chart to track how much you smoke daily.
2. Work on the benefits you will get by quitting smoking.
3. Make a list of pros and cons of quitting smoking.
4. Estimate how much you spend on cigarettes.
5. Live in smoke-free environments.
6. Identify social and family support.
7. Be aware of the nicotine physical dependence and withdrawal symptoms.
8. Strengthen your commitment.
9. Pick a day to quit smoking.

HOW AND WHEN TO EXPECT RESULTS

Health benefits are very important, and many of them are immediate for both men and women of all ages.

List of benefits from quitting smoking. Many of them are of quick recovery; others take longer, hence the importance of starting as soon as possible.

20 minutes: Blood pressure and heart rate (pulse) return to normal. The circulation and temperature of your hands and feet improve.

8 hours: Blood nicotine levels lower significantly (notice that withdrawal symptoms appear).

12 hours: Blood oxygen levels increase and the concentration of the toxic gas carbon monoxide decreases, returning to normal. This is noticeable in the absence of fatigue during the day and dullness upon awakening.

48 hours: Smell and taste begin to improve.

72 hours: Shortness of breath and respiratory function improve.

5-8 days: Some people develop cough and expectoration as a manifestation of vitality restored to the bronchial cilia as airway defense.

10 days to 2 weeks: Blood circulation in your gums returns to normal and irritation is reduced. The risk of tooth decay and tooth loss decreases.

2-4 weeks: Cholesterol levels improve. Platelets and coagulation function return to normal.

2 weeks to 3 months: The risk of a heart attack decreases. Lung function improves.

3 weeks to 3 months: Walking longer at a faster pace becomes easier. Chronic coughing decreases or disappears.

1-9 months: Sinus congestion decreases. The risk of respiratory infections decreases. The arterial function improves significantly in the whole body. Stress score values are significantly reduced.

1 year: The risk of coronary heart disease, acute myocardial infarction and stroke drops by half.

5-10 years: The risk of stroke declines to that of a non-smoker.

10 years: The risk of lung cancer decreases between 30% and 50% compared to continued smoking. Risk of death from lung cancer declines by 50% compared to a smoker of 20 cigarettes/day. The risk of mouth, throat and esophageal cancer decreases, and the risk of pancreatic cancer declines to that of a non-smoker.

15 years: The risk of coronary heart disease is similar to that of a person who has never smoked.

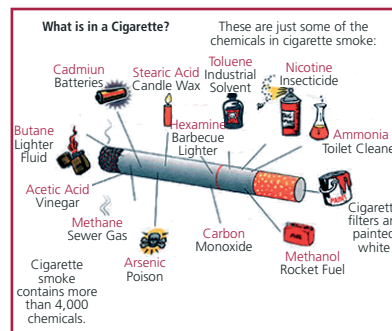
20 years: Excess risk of death from all smoking related causes, including lung disease and cancer, is comparable to that of a non-smoker.

Several institutions and healthcare professionals trained in smoking cessation provide guidance and support in this process. If necessary, effective medication can be prescribed to overcome the withdrawal syndrome resulting from quitting smoking.

PREVENTION

The most effective measures to avoid smoking include:

- Increasing the price of cigarettes.
- Banning the sale of tobacco to minors.
- Complete banning of publicity and sponsorship of tobacco products.
- Implementation of 100% smoke-free indoor environments.



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