

Smoking increases your coronavirus risk. There's never been a better time to quit

April 14 2020, by Billie Bonevski, Caitlin Bialek and Eliza Skelton



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If you're a smoker, there's really never been a better time to quit. Coronavirus affects your lungs, causing flu-like [symptoms](#) such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat and fatigue. In the most serious cases, sufferers struggle to breathe at all and can die of respiratory

failure.

The World Health Organisation [recommends people quit smoking](#) as it makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection.

Here's what we know about smoking and COVID-19 risk—and how you can boost your chances of quitting while under lockdown.

Smoking and COVID-19 risk

Early data from [China](#) suggests smoking history is one factor that the risk of poor outcomes in COVID-19 patients.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, smoking is a leading risk factor for [chronic disease and death](#).

Smokers are more susceptible to developing heart disease, which so far seems to be the highest risk factor for the [COVID-19 death rate](#). The Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine at the University of Oxford [reports](#) that smoking seemed to be a factor associated with poor survival in Italy, where 24% of people smoke.

We know that immunosuppressed people are at higher risk if they get COVID-19 and [cigarette smoke](#) is an [immunosuppressant](#).

And the hand-to-mouth action of smoking makes smokers vulnerable to COVID-19 as they are touching their [mouth and face](#) more often.

We don't yet know if recent ex-smokers are at higher risk of COVID-19 than people who have never smoked. Given the lungs heal rapidly after quitting smoking, being an ex-smoker is likely to decrease your chances of complications due to [COVID-19](#).

Reduce your COVID-19 risks today by quitting

The benefits of quitting smoking are almost [immediate](#). Within 24 hours of quitting, the body starts to recover and repair. Lung function improves and respiratory symptoms become less severe.

You might not notice the changes immediately, but they will become obvious [within months of quitting](#). And the improvements are sustained with long-term abstinence.

Tiny hairs in your lungs and airways (called cilia) get better at clearing mucus and debris. You'll start to notice you're breathing more easily.

Symptoms of chronic bronchitis, such as chronic cough, mucus production and wheeze, decrease rapidly. Among people with [asthma](#), lung function improves within a few months of quitting and [treatments](#) are more effective.

Respiratory infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia also decrease with [quitting](#).

People should seek behavioural counselling support to work through motivations to quit, strategies for dealing with triggers, and distraction techniques.

And you can get behavioural support from your doctor or a psychologist via telephone Quitlines in your state or territory or [online](#).

[Several studies](#) suggest that some people quit smoking without assistance. If you feel you need extra help, talk to your doctor about nicotine gum, patches, inhalators, lozenges or prescription medications. If you can't get in to see a GP, you can try a [telehealth](#) consultation or consider over-the-counter products.

Quitting while in lockdown

Physical distancing and lockdown measures may make it more challenging to get the support you need to quit smoking—but not impossible.

If [financial stress](#) is undermining your attempts to stop smoking, [calculate](#) how much money you can save by quitting (and whatever you do, don't share cigarettes with someone else). [Financial support](#) is available if COVID-19 has affected your income.

Social support, even during lockdown, is crucial. Why not organise a group of friends also wanting to quit and support each other via [Houseparty](#), Zoom or Skype?

Pandemic or no pandemic, smoking poses an enormous risk to your health—and hurts your finances, too.

Any effort you put in now to reduce your [smoking](#) or stub it out altogether will reduce your risk if you do get COVID-19, help you live longer and enjoy a higher quality of life. We wish you the very best of luck with it.

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