

What happens to your body when you quit smoking

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Giving up cigarettes can be excruciating, with cravings and withdrawal

symptoms lingering for weeks, especially if you aren't strongly motivated.

Yet, just minutes after that first smoke-free breath, your body starts to change for the better. And with all the healthy breaths you take in the weeks and months that follow, the [benefits](#) only multiply.

The health benefits of quitting [smoking](#) is the first and biggest reason to quit, according to the American Lung Association (ALA).

"Even persons who have smoked for many years or who have smoked heavily can realize health and [financial benefits](#) from quitting smoking," Dr. Robert Redfield, then director of the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, wrote in a forward to the 2020 U.S. Surgeon General's report on smoking cessation.

"Although the benefits of quitting are greater the earlier in life that an individual quits, this report confirms that it is never too late to quit smoking," he added.

Quitting will be hard, but worthwhile

Here's what happens when you stop smoking: Withdrawal symptoms of quitting smoking include cravings, irritability and restlessness. Some will also have issues with concentration, trouble sleeping, hunger, weight gain and feelings of depression, anxiety or sadness, according to the CDC.

The [health benefits](#) of quitting smoking start about 20 minutes after the last drag. That's when a smoker's heart rate and [blood pressure](#) both begin to decline, according to the American Cancer Society (ACS).

It takes a few days for blood carbon monoxide levels to normalize. In two weeks to three months, circulation begins to improve and [lung](#)

[function](#) increases, according to the ACS.

More gradually, that smoker's cough goes away as mucus leaves the lungs. This is because the "cilia," tiny hair-like structures in your lungs, have begun to heal.

While it can't reverse lung scarring, quitting can help prevent the symptoms of lung disease from worsening, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' [smokefree.gov](#).

Over time, your [risk of pneumonia](#) and lung cancer also decrease, according to the ALA.

A stronger body is just one of the benefits of quitting

This newfound strength includes a reduced risk of bone fractures later in life, according to smokefree.gov. A more robust immune system will help you stay healthy, while your muscles will get stronger because of more availability of oxygen in your blood.

And this doesn't even get to the more serious advantages to becoming a nonsmoker, which include a lowered risk for [heart disease](#), stroke and certain cancers.

A person's risk of having a heart attack drops dramatically in one to two years, according to the ACS.

In one study, presented recently at a meeting of the European Society of Cardiology, Dutch researchers found that quitting smoking appeared to work as well as taking three medications to prevent heart attacks and strokes in patients who had either a [heart attack](#) or a procedure to open blocked arteries.

"The benefits of smoking cessation are even greater than we realized," study author Dr. Tinka van Trier, of Amsterdam University Medical Centre, said in a news release on the study.

Some fertility issues even resolve as estrogen levels return to normal, according to smokefree.gov.

Quitting smoking also reduces the risk of developing 12 types of cancer. The risk of certain cancers is cut in half in about five to 10 years, according to the ACS.

In another study published in the journal *JAMA Network Open* recently, researchers from the ACS and others found that smoking was associated with at least twice the all-cause death rate of never smoking. Quitting, especially at younger ages, was associated with a significant decline in relative excess deaths.

Quitting smoking makes you look better

Among the beauty improvements of quitting are clearer skin and less wrinkling, smokefree.gov notes.

As your teeth and fingernails stop yellowing, your breath will be fresher, and your hair and clothes won't smell like smoke anymore, according to the ACS.

Some other tangible benefits are better-tasting food and a better sense of smell.

It's better for brain health, too

Mental decline was also lower for those who quit, especially if they gave

up tobacco by middle age, according to a study published recently in the [Journal of Alzheimer's Disease](#).

The researchers used a one-question self-assessment survey to gauge subjective thinking declines among 136,000 current and former smokers.

"The association we saw was most significant in the 45-to-59 age group, suggesting that quitting at that stage of life may have a benefit for cognitive health," said study author Jeffrey Wing, an assistant professor of epidemiology at Ohio State University.

More information: Blake Thomson et al, Association Between Smoking, Smoking Cessation, and Mortality by Race, Ethnicity, and Sex Among US Adults, *JAMA Network Open* (2022). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.31480](#)

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