

9059 - Weight Gain and Smoking



One of the common reasons to not quit smoking is the fear of gaining weight. One in five people who quit smoking don't gain any weight at all. For those that do, it's normally around five added pounds. This may also just be the initial gain. Your body is trying to get back to normal. This includes the normal weight without your body being hijacked by nicotine. Below are several explanations as to why people gain weight while trying to quit.

Why do people gain weight when they quit smoking?: Smoking can burn up to 200 calories a day in a heavy smoker. Smoking boosts your metabolism slightly and nicotine is an appetite suppressant. When you quit smoking these two factors are working against you. But not all is lost. Keeping up your regular exercise routine should counter-act the body's response to quitting smoking. If you don't normally exercise, a 30 minute brisk walk daily will help avoid weight gain along with help relieve you of stress.

Why do I want to eat more?: Quitting smoking throws our bodies into shock at first. Our bodies have adjusted to the constant influx of nicotine into our system and is now being forced to adjust. Here are two factors that may cause you to eat more while you are quitting smoking.

➤ **Cigarettes as an appetite suppressant.**

Smokers often avoid snacking by having a cigarette instead. This is a behavioural factor that may cause you to smoke more. Replacing a smoke with a snack isn't a bad choice if you snack smart. Choose fruit, veggies or low calorie/fat snacks like health conscious popcorn or crackers. Nicotine is a stimulant, and may also interfere with the release of the hormone insulin. Insulin controls glucose levels in the blood. When this function is blocked, a person will become slightly hyperglycemic, and as a result, the body and brain may slow down the hormones and other signals that trigger feelings of hunger. This is one of the mechanisms that nicotine suppresses the appetite.

➤ **Food as a replacement for smoking.** □

Early on in the quitting process people tend to replace the often and uncomfortable urge to smoke with eating. It's natural to look for something to replace the action of smoking with another activity focused around the mouth. Not only is food a common distraction but there is also an emotional comfort component with food as well.

What can I do to avoid gaining weight when I quit smoking?

Exercise: While this is an obvious answer it's a very practical one as well. Exercising increases your metabolism which has been slowed since you quit smoking. Even just a brisk walk for thirty minutes five times a week can have a great impact! Exercise will also boost your mood and help clear your head of cravings.

Healthy Snacks: The key to eating healthy is preparing ahead of time. Have several healthy snacks ready so when your craving hits, you're prepared.

- Vegetable sticks - celery, carrot
- 94% fat free popcorn
- Sunflower seeds in the shell
- Water - drink lots of it!
- Hard candies to suck on
- Fresh fruit
- Herbal teas

Also be smart about what you keep in the house. Keep your temptations out of sight, out of mind!

Avoid Alcohol: While this may seem like a double whammy –alcohol is just empty calories that are likely to trigger you back into smoking. Avoid situations that tempt you, such as your usual cigarette while drinking.

One Challenge at a Time: Most importantly you need to take it one day at a time. Don't try and avoid all weight gain while quitting – tackle one obstacle at a time. Focus your energy and you'll succeed!

Source: <http://quitsmoking.about.com>

