
Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

Tobacco Cessation: How to Change?

To effectively change your tobacco use, consider all of the factors that contribute to using tobacco. It can be helpful to group these factors into three main categories: physical factors, habits, and psychological factors (i.e., your thoughts and emotions).

Physically, nicotine is the most addictive substance on the planet. Your medical provider will tell you whether it is appropriate for you to use a nicotine replacement, such as the patch or gum. Some medications, like Zyban, can help decrease cravings for tobacco. Sometimes, using two of these products together can help relieve cravings and withdrawal symptoms better.

Behaviorally, you will need to change your habits and the situations that you typically associate with tobacco. Undoubtedly, you will experience situations that cause you to crave tobacco, but you can learn skills that will help you choose alternatives other than using tobacco. Practical counseling and support are available to help you through this process. This counseling can help you recognize situations that tempt you to use tobacco, problem-solve and develop skills to cope with these situations. Even brief counseling greatly increases the success of a quit attempt. In addition to services in primary care, VA offers tobacco cessation groups and/or individual counseling. Also, if you would find telephone counseling supportive, you can call VA Quitline 1-855-QUIT-VET.

Thoughts and emotions are some of the hardest aspects of tobacco use to change. Often, individuals think that they need tobacco to get through a difficult situation. Changing these thoughts to cope with stress and negative emotions is an essential aspect of successful tobacco cessation.

Preparing to Quit

Your Quit Date

When is the last day and time that you are going to use tobacco?

Month_____ Day_____ Year_____ Time_____

Preparing Your Surroundings

What are the things that remind you to use tobacco? It is important to change your surroundings so that you won't be reminded about tobacco use as frequently. Before your quit date consider the following:

- Don't buy tobacco in bulk (e.g., don't buy cartons).
- Find all of your hidden stashes of tobacco. Check in the couch, the glove compartment, in your drawers at home and at work. It is unwise to keep an emergency stash once you quit.
- Get rid of tobacco-related materials—things like ashtrays and lighters. You may need lighters for candles or fireplaces, but you likely don't need to carry lighters wherever you go.
- Prepare family and friends. Let them know that you are planning to quit and ask for their help. If you have friends and family who do use tobacco, ask them to avoid using tobacco around you.
- Prepare and develop a plan for coping with cravings and withdrawal symptoms. Use the combination of strategies that works for you.
- Choose a method to quit. There are several ways to consider quitting, but one of the most important considerations is to avoid thinking favorably about your last tobacco use. If you remember your tobacco fondly, then you may be more likely to go back to tobacco use when you perceive that you need it. Here are some ways to avoid romanticizing your last use of tobacco:

Nicotine fading. Gradually decrease the amount of tobacco you are using. You can do this by decreasing how often you use your current tobacco, or you can switch to another brand of tobacco that has less nicotine.

Brand Switching. On the day that you are planning to quit, use a different brand of tobacco, preferably a brand that tastes stronger or significantly different from the brand that you use today. Rather than the pleasant sensation you associate with your current brand, you'll remember the more unpleasant taste of the new brand.

Aversive Tobacco Use. The last time that you use tobacco, use a lot of it or use it quickly. Again, the idea is to have your last memory of tobacco be an unpleasant memory. So you might decide to smoke your last cigarette very rapidly, or use two to three times as much chewing tobacco as you normally do.

Using the Four A's to Outsmart Tobacco Urges

Avoid. What are the situations or places that you need to avoid over the next month?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Alter. What situations will you need to change to help you be more successful?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Alternatives. What can you put in your mouth or hands instead of using tobacco?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Action. When you get an urge to use tobacco, what can you do to be active or busy?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Follow-Up Appointment Plan:

Adapted from: Hunter, C.L., Goodie, J.L., Oordt, M.S., & Dobmeyer, A.C. (2017). *Integrated Behavioral Health in Primary Care: Step-by-step Guidance for Assessment and Intervention* (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association.