

About weight gain

Some people feel worried that when they quit smoking they will put on weight. It's important to remember you are not going on a diet - you are quitting smoking. The reason why you may experience physical changes is because your body is dealing with three parts of an addiction, the nicotine addiction, the emotional addiction and the smoking habit. The following information explains how these parts of the addiction effect hunger.

1

Nicotine

Nicotine from tobacco suppresses your appetite so when you stop smoking your appetite returns. Sometimes the problem is that the body will initially feel that it needs sweet, sugary foods - this may happen even to those who don't usually crave sweets. This is because sugar is added to tobacco to make it taste better and so for the first few days after quitting you might experience low blood-sugar levels. You can prepare by having fruit or sugar-free gum on hand. Smoking also takes away the taste of food and so you are less likely to eat as much. When you stop smoking, things will taste better so you will probably want to eat the stuff you've been missing out on. Smoking does increase your metabolism by a very small amount, so people think that weight gain is due to the change in metabolism. However this change is very slight and it is more likely that weight is gained due to emotional reasons or habit.

2

Emotion

Quitting smoking can be like saying goodbye to a friend, something you always rely on when you're stressed or need a pick-me-up and like a friend it makes you feel better. Some people find that food is a good way of replacing cigarettes to get this feel-good factor. You can deal with this by doing different things to help you deal with stress. At Quitline we send out The Quit Book which has a Tear-out Diary to help you figure out what your emotional triggers are. The Quit Book is a free resource sent to everyone who signs up with Quitline. You can also use our QuitCoach tool which will help you work out a plan to beat the addiction.

3

Habit

You may also find that when you are quitting you replace the hand-to-mouth habit of smoking with the hand-to-mouth eating behaviour. Part of quitting is to change some of your habits and routines. If you used to smoke after a meal, choose something else to do instead. Here are some examples:

- Clean your teeth
- Drink water
- Eat a piece of fruit
- Go for a walk
- Phone a friend
- Do the dishes

It can be hard for your body to recognise the difference between hunger and a craving when you first stop smoking, so when you feel hungry at a time that you don't usually eat it's probably because you're craving a cigarette.

How do I deal with hunger cravings?

Learn about the four things you can do to get through your cravings, at Quitline we call these the **4 Ds**: Delay, Deep Breathe, Drink Water, Do something else ([click here for more info](#)). If you think you need extra help to take the edge off your nicotine cravings, you can use the subsidised patches, gum or lozenges available from Quitline for about \$5 for an eight week supply, this is a good way to work on the emotional and habit parts of your addiction before focusing on the nicotine part, and you can order this on your [member page](#).

Make a plan

If you're still worried about gaining weight, it could help to talk to a doctor or do some research and make a healthy eating and exercise plan. By making a meal plan, you can focus your mind on a particular time for eating and avoid snacking between meals. It is also a good way of learning about the calories and vitamins in different foods and what your body needs to keep healthy.

But cigarettes help me look good!

If you think that the chance of gaining weight is not worth it, remember that smoking harms your appearance too. It makes you look older and unhealthy by starving your skin of oxygen, this makes it look dry and grey. You get wrinkles around your eyes and mouth much earlier than a non-smoker and the tar stains your teeth and fingers, and the stink of smoke can be really off-putting for people. Research also shows that many people in New Zealand do not want to date a smoker. Remember, your weight is likely to go back to normal when your body adjusts to being a non-smoker. Be kind to yourself. A lot of ex-smokers say the feeling of freedom they get when they stop smoking is worth putting on a few kilos because they know they can always lose the weight later.

Additional support

Here are some websites that offer healthy eating tips and advice on keeping fit:

- <http://weightmanagement.hiirc.org.nz/>
A site with a range of information and resources about how to manage your weight.
- <http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/healthy-living>
Information on exercise and fitness, healthy eating and losing weight.
- <https://activesmart.co.nz/>
A free online fitness training programme that covers lifestyle, fitness and nutrition.