

Too Late For Seniors To Stop Smoking?

Q: When you are older, it is ever too late to quit smoking?

A: No. It's never too late to stop smoking. Around 9% of Americans age 65 over smoke. The leading cause of preventable death is from smoking: 480,000 people die in the United States from smoking each year

Most older smokers know that it's not good for them. They know that quitting would lead to many improvements in their life. They know that if they quit, they would save money (\$21,900 saved over 10 years for a 1 pack-a-day user), cough less, have better smelling breath, fewer wrinkles, and more energy. They would also lower their risk of heart attack, stroke, bronchitis, and cataracts, among other diseases.

Quitting has benefits at any age—and some of the improvements are immediate. Here are the benefits compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- **20 minutes after quitting** your heart rate drops.
- **12 hours after quitting** carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- **2 weeks to 3 months after quitting** your heart attack risk begins to drop, and your lung function begins to improve.
- **1 to 9 months after quitting** your coughing and shortness of breath decrease.
- **1 year after quitting** your added risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker's.
- **5 years after quitting** your stroke risk is reduced to that of a nonsmoker's 5-15 years after quitting.
- **10 years after quitting** your lung cancer death rate is about half that of a smoker's, and your risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas decreases.
- **15 years after quitting** your risk of coronary heart disease is back to that of a nonsmoker's.

But older smokers face some real challenges in quitting. You may have tried to quit more than once before, and were unsuccessful. If you weren't able to quit before, you know how hard it can be—and you may feel too discouraged to try again. For people who have smoked for many years, giving it up may feel like saying goodbye to a friend. Nicotine is very addictive. One of the greatest challenges most smokers face is getting through the withdrawal symptoms in the first couple of weeks.

Many former smokers age 50 and older say their main reason for quitting was for their health or because their doctor told them to stop. But smokers also quit to take back control of their lives, or to help a loved one who wants them healthier. Older adults have had lots of experience accomplishing difficult tasks. They're likely to be better prepared to take on the challenge of quitting smoking than when they were younger. They know quitting is tough, and they know it won't be easy—but once they decide to try again, they may be more willing to work at it to make sure they succeed.

The National Cancer Institute has a 44 page booklet called [Clear Horizons: A Quit-Smoking Guide for People 50 and Older](#), which explains how to set a "Quit Date," and develop a "Quit Plan" that uses friends and family for support, offers tips to break smoking patterns, resisting negative thinking, and medications that can help

The fact is, older smokers are the most successful at quitting. The "quit ratio" of former smokers to ever smokers who quit in the previous year is around 80% for people age 65 and over. If you're an older smoker thinking of quitting—the odds are with you. For more information:

<http://nihseniorhealth.gov/quittingsmoking/quittingwhenyoureolder/01.html>