Tobacco and Diabetes

While **quitting** smoking or chewing tobacco may not be easy, it could be the best thing you can do to prevent the complications of diabetes.

Your blood sugar level

Tobacco raises your blood sugar level. This makes it harder to control your diabetes. Nicotine and other products in tobacco smoke make it more difficult for insulin to work properly.[3] Additionally, chewing tobacco is high in sugar.[7]

Your eyes

If you use tobacco, it is likely you will experience even more trouble with your sight. Diabetes can block the tiny blood vessels in the eyes. This condition is called retinopathy. Tobacco makes your eyes even less healthy.[3]

Your teeth

If you smoke or chew tobacco and have diabetes, you will have a greater chance of developing gum disease and losing your teeth.[3] The sugar and harsh chemicals in tobacco eat away at the teeth and gums.[7]

Your nerves

If you have diabetes, smoking will increase the risk of nerve damage in all parts of your body, causing numbness and sometimes pain. This may occur because tobacco damages the blood vessels that carry oxygen and nutrients to the nerves. Smoking slows down blood flow and blocks blood vessels in the penis, and nerve damage reduces sensation. If you are a man who uses tobacco and has diabetes, you are more likely to experience problems having an erection.[3]

Your heart

You are more likely to have a heart attack or stroke and three times more likely to die of heart disease if you have diabetes and use tobacco. The nicotine in all tobacco products increases your heart rate. The carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke reduces oxygen in the blood. Tobacco causes blood vessels to constrict.[5] This means your heart has to work harder to pump blood throughout the body. Smoking makes blood cells stick together and chemicals in tobacco harm blood vessels so that fat attaches to the vessel walls even faster, causing them to clog. Uncontrolled blood glucose levels also cause blood vessels to narrow. Together, these symptoms lead to heart attack and stroke.[3]

Your kidneys

Even in people without diabetes, smoking triples the chances of developing kidney disease. Smoking increases blood pressure and affects chemicals in the body that control kidney function.[3] Medications that successfully prevent kidney failure in most nonsmoking diabetics (ACE Inhibitors) may not help tobacco users with diabetes.[2]

Your feet

It is extremely unusual for a person with diabetes to have a leg amputated due to blocked blood vessels unless they use tobacco. Tobacco slows the circulation in the smaller blood vessels. People with diabetes are already more likely to suffer from poor circulation in their feet and legs. Tobacco use can also aggravate foot ulcers, foot infections and blood vessel disease in the legs.[3]

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How to Quit

- **Set a quit date.** Within 2 weeks is best.
- **Tell family and friends you are quitting.** Social support helps!
- **Think about what you can learn** from past quit attempt experiences. What worked? What didn't?
- **Anticipate challenges.** Symptoms such as irritability, cravings, insomnia & coughing may occur for 2-3 weeks after quitting.
- **Remove tobacco products.** In addition, ask family members who use tobacco not to smoke around you or leave their tobacco products where you can get them during your quit attempt.
- **Avoid alcohol.** About half of smokers who try to quit and relapse do so when drinking.
- **Ask your doctor about medications to help you quit.** Using Zyban (bupropion SR) or nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) will double or triple your chance of quitting successfully by reducing nicotine withdrawal symptoms, including cravings.[4]
- **Enroll in a support program to help you quit.** For example, utahquitnet.com or the Utah Tobacco Quit Line: 1-888-567-TRUTH

Don't be too tough on yourself if quitting takes a few tries.

The average smoker or chewer must make several quit attempts before they quit for good. Each attempt increases the odds that the next try will be successful.[4]

Learning from Unsuccessful Quit Attempts

What were the most common triggers that caused you to slip?

- ☐ Persons
- ☐ Places
- ☐ Things
- ☐ Situations

For each trigger list two new ways you can deal with the trigger so you won't slip. Repeat the process if the new ways don't work.

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Is it true that I will gain weight if I quit using tobacco?

Some people–but not all–do gain weight as they quit. However, this weight gain is usually limited to between 5 and 10 lbs. and some of this weight gain can be prevented.

Cause of Weight Gain	Is this preventable?
Nicotine increases metabolism in a way that is harmful to health: it causes body tension, accelerates the heart rate, increases blood pressure and causes physical agitation.[6] When you quit smoking, your metabolism returns to normal rates and your body returns to the weight it would have been had you never smoked.[9]	No. However, weight gain is usually limited to 10 lbs. or less and can be delayed by using bupropion SR or NRT.
You might gain 3 to 5 pounds due to water retention during the first week after quitting.[9]	No. But it will go away after a week.
Tobacco use reduces the ability to smell, so food is naturally more appealing when you quit. Since food tastes better, some quitters to eat more than they did as tobacco users.[8]	Yes!
Tobacco users develop a habit of frequently putting their hands to their mouth to smoke or chew. When they give up tobacco, some people continue this habit, substituting food for tobacco.[8]	Yes!
Cravings for cigarettes or chew during nicotine withdrawal can be confused for hunger pangs.[8]	Yes!

Healthy Ways to Minimize Weight Gain

- Become More Physically Active. In addition to helping control weight, exercise may help relieve the stress and depression caused by purging nicotine from the body.[9] Some studies have shown that increased physical activity actually improves quit rates in addition to reducing weight gain.[4]
- Gradually improve eating habits. Strict dieting does not prevent weight gain in quitters and makes it harder to quit using tobacco.[4]
- Replace smoking with healthy activities. Snack on fruit or sugarless gum to satisfy any sweet cravings. Replace the action of holding cigarettes with activities like doodling, working puzzles, knitting, twirling a straw, or holding a pen or pencil. Relieve tension by meditating, taking a walk, soaking in the tub, or taking deep breaths.[9]
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water and juice. [8]Drinking lots of water both cleanses the body of nicotine, decreasing the duration and severity of withdrawal symptoms, and helps people feel more full so they don't overeat.[6 & 1] But avoid caffeinated beverages, which may make nicotine withdrawal worse.[9]
- Get enough sleep. When you feel tired, you are more likely to crave tobacco and food.[9]
- Try not to panic about modest weight gain.[9] Some weight gain is the healthy result of returning to normal metabolism.[6] The health risks of smoking are far greater than the risks of gaining 5 to 10 pounds.[4] You would have to gain about 100 pounds after quitting to make your health risks as high as when you smoked.[9]

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