



# What to Tell Your Patients About Smoking

*A Report of the Surgeon General: How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease*



## Quitting Will Save Your Patients' Lives

Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Recent studies show that brief advice from a clinician about smoking cessation yielded a 66% increase in successful quit rates. Talk to your patients. Tell them that quitting smoking is the most important step they can take to improve their health. They will listen to you.

## How to Help Patients Quit\*

### Assist the tobacco user to:

- Set a quit date, ideally within 2 weeks.
- Remove tobacco products from the environment.
- Get support from family, friends, and coworkers.
- Review past quit attempts—what helped, what led to relapse.
- Anticipate challenges, particularly during the critical first few weeks, including nicotine withdrawal.
- Identify reasons for quitting and benefits of quitting.

### Give advice on successful quitting:

- Total abstinence is essential—not even a single puff.
- Drinking alcohol is strongly associated with relapse.
- Allowing others to smoke in the household hinders successful quitting.

### Encourage use of medication:

- Recommend use of over-the-counter nicotine patch, gum, or lozenge; or give prescription for varenicline, bupropion SR, nicotine inhaler, or nasal spray, unless contraindicated.

### Provide resources:

- Recommend 1-800-QUIT NOW (784-8669), the national access number to state-based quitline services.
- Refer to Web sites for free materials ([www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov) and [www.ahrq.gov/path/tobacco.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/path/tobacco.htm)).

\*Excerpted from *Helping Smokers Quit: A Guide for Clinicians* (Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update, A Clinical Practice Guideline) found at [www.ahrq.gov/path/tobacco.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/path/tobacco.htm)

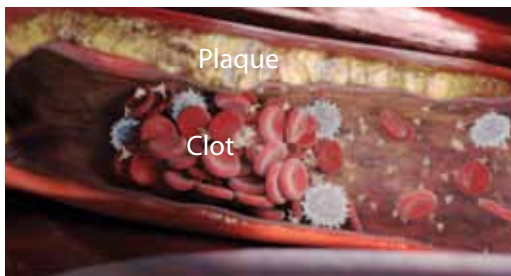


## Summary of Findings from the 2010 Report of the Surgeon General

1. **There is no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke.** Any exposure to tobacco smoke – even an occasional cigarette or exposure to secondhand smoke – is harmful.
2. **Damage from tobacco smoke is immediate.** Tobacco smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals and chemical compounds, which reach your lungs every time you inhale. Your blood then carries the poisons to all parts of your body. These poisons damage DNA, which can lead to cancer; damage blood vessels and cause clotting, which can cause heart attacks and strokes; and damage the lungs, which can cause asthma attacks, emphysema, and chronic bronchitis.
3. **Smoking longer means more damage.** Both the risk and the severity of many diseases caused by smoking are directly related to how long the smoker has smoked and the number of cigarettes smoked per day.
4. **Cigarettes are designed for addiction.** The design and contents of tobacco products make them more attractive and addictive than ever before. Nicotine addiction keeps people smoking even when they want to quit.
5. **Even low levels of exposure, including exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke, are dangerous.** You don't have to be a heavy smoker or a long-time smoker to get a smoking-related disease or have a heart attack or asthma attack triggered by smoke.
6. **There is no safe cigarette.**

“ You can quit, and I can help. ”

# What to Tell Your Patients About Smoking and Chronic Diseases



## High Blood Pressure and Heart Disease

Smoking causes dangerous plaque buildup inside your arteries. Plaque clogs and narrows your arteries. Poisons from tobacco smoke also quickly damage blood vessels and make blood more likely to clot. This can block blood flow and lead to heart attack, stroke, or even sudden death.

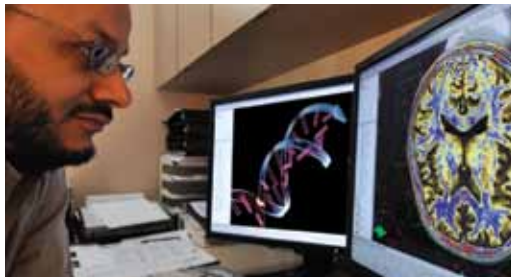
Quitting smoking will improve your heart health. After just one year your risk for a heart attack drops sharply, and *even if you've already had a heart attack, you cut your risk of having another one by a third to a half if you quit smoking*. Two to four years after you quit, your risk for stroke falls to about the same as a nonsmoker's.



## Diabetes

*If you have diabetes and smoke, your risk for kidney disease is 2 to 3 times higher than if you don't smoke.* Smokers with diabetes also have higher risk for heart disease and eye disease that can cause blindness; nerve damage that causes numbness, pain, weakness, and poor circulation; and amputations. You will also have more difficulty recovering from surgery.

After you quit smoking, you will have better control over your blood sugar levels. When you quit, you will be less likely to have heart or kidney disease, blindness, or amputations.



## Cancer

Tobacco smoke contains toxic chemicals that can damage your DNA and lead to cancer. *Nearly one-third of all cancer deaths are directly linked to smoking.* Continuing to smoke weakens the cancer-fighting systems of your body. It can also interfere with your cancer treatment.

## Fertility and Pregnancy

Smoking reduces a woman's chance of getting pregnant and damages DNA in sperm. Damage to sperm could decrease fertility and lead to miscarriage or birth defects. Women who smoke during pregnancy have a higher risk for pregnancy complications, delivering their babies early, and stillbirth. Their babies are more likely to have low birth weight or to die from sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS. Tobacco smoke also damages the tissues of your unborn baby's growing brain and lungs and could interfere with the growth of the placenta, the organ that feeds the baby in the womb. This could lead to miscarriage, premature delivery, or low birth weight.

*Men and women who are planning to have children should not smoke. Pregnant women should avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.*

## Resources for Quitting

- Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW
- Nicotine replacement or prescription drugs ([www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm198176.htm](http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm198176.htm))
- [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)
- [www.women.smokefree.gov](http://www.women.smokefree.gov)

Most people find a combination of resources works best. Many people do not quit on their first attempt. Many smokers need several tries to successfully quit. But the benefits are well worth it. Keep trying.

