

# WebMD<sup>®</sup>

## TAKE CONTROL

### SMOKING CESSATION

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SPRING 2026

# THE LATEST ON SMOKING CESSATION

## SUPPORT EQUALS SUCCESS

Pregnancy is a strong motivator to quit smoking, but staying smoke-free after giving birth can still be challenging. In a U.S. study of 280 women, researchers found that most relapses happened within the first three months after childbirth, particularly among those with a long smoking history or multiple quitting attempts. Despite these challenges, nearly 50% reported not smoking for a complete year after giving birth, showing that it is possible to quit. With additional support right after delivery and continued encouragement from your doctor and loved ones, many mothers can avoid relapses.

SOURCE: *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*

# 2x

**Increase in the risk of infertility among women who smoke compared with nonsmokers.**

SOURCE: American Society for Reproductive Medicine

About **7% to 4%**

**Decline in the number of women who smoked cigarettes at any point during pregnancy in the U.S. from 2016 to 2022.**

SOURCE: CDC

## THERE'S NO SAFE SMOKING WINDOW

Research shows that exposure to cigarette smoke before or shortly after learning you are pregnant can leave lasting effects on your baby's developing brain, meaning that you cannot fully undo the harm even if you quit smoking as soon as you find out that you are pregnant. Based on a U.S. survey of 8,068 participants, a study found that children exposed to smoking during pregnancy had a higher risk of attention and behavior difficulties and learning problems than children whose mothers did not smoke. The risk increased the longer into the pregnancy that the mother smoked. These findings suggest that quitting smoking early—ideally before conception—is key.

SOURCE: *Frontiers in Public Health*

## WHAT MAKES QUITTING SO HARD?

Stressful life events during pregnancy are linked to unhealthy coping behaviors like smoking, and they can also raise health risks. A survey of 24,209 U.S. mothers shows that smoking during pregnancy and after delivery was more common among women facing trauma, financial strain, or relationship challenges, which also increased their risk for health issues such as high blood pressure or depression. By receiving stress screening, emotional care, and help from trained support workers throughout the perinatal period, women can feel understood and better equipped to quit smoking.

SOURCE: *Maternal and Child Health Journal*



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**Smoking** during pregnancy increases birth defects and creates **long-term health effects** for mothers.



### **The best time to quit smoking**

is before pregnancy, but it's never too late to quit to help improve you and your baby's health.

Quitting smoking is possible with free and proven cessation tools.

**Tobacco Free Florida can help.**

For more information, visit  
[TobaccoFreeFlorida.com/QuitYourWay](https://TobaccoFreeFlorida.com/QuitYourWay).



# STATS & FACTS

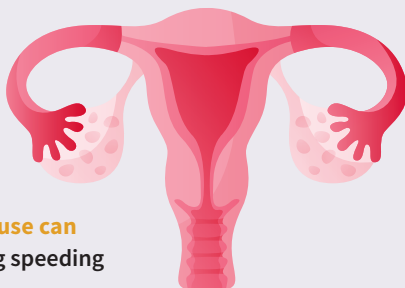
Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO, MS,  
WebMD Medical Reviewer



## ABOUT 3 in 5

Number of U.S. women who said a health care provider asked about smoking during a checkup after childbirth, based on a survey.

## 1 to 4



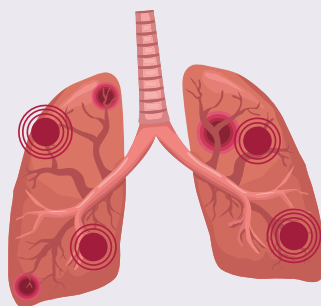
How many years earlier menopause can happen in women due to smoking speeding up the loss of eggs in the ovaries.

## WITHIN 3

Number of months after you stop smoking in which lung function starts improving and your heart attack risk begins to drop.

## 2x

Increase in abnormal bleeding risk during pregnancy and delivery among women who smoke.

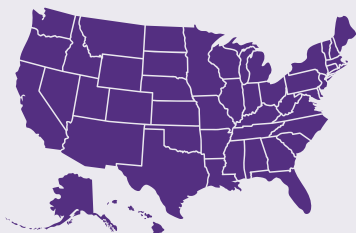


## 60

Duration in minutes of secondhand smoke exposure that can cause harm to the lungs, causing inflammation.

## NEARLY 34,000

Number of adults in the U.S. who do not smoke but die early from heart disease caused by secondhand smoke each year.



## OVER 7,000

Number of chemicals found in tobacco smoke, which is why staying smoke-free is important, especially for your children.



SOURCES: CDC, American Lung Association, American Society for Reproductive Medicine

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## EMBRACE A **TOBACCO FREE LIFE** FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR BABY.

Whether you're...



Looking to get pregnant



Expecting a baby



Have a newborn

...it's always a good idea and the right time to quit smoking.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- ◆ Women who smoke have a higher risk of never being able to become pregnant.
- ◆ Smoking during pregnancy can harm the baby's lungs, heart and brain. It can even be fatal.
- ◆ Women who quit smoking are less likely to develop heart disease, lung disease and many different forms of cancer.
- ◆ Smoking during or after pregnancy increases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

**Free quit tools and services are available from Tobacco Free Florida  
and are proven effective to help you stay quit.**

For more information, visit  
[TobaccoFreeFlorida.com/EmbraceForBoth](https://TobaccoFreeFlorida.com/EmbraceForBoth).



**Florida  
HEALTH**

# WHY IS QUITTING SMOKING SO DIFFICULT?

An expert weighs in



waking up, taking a walk, or doing something pleasurable. That's what makes it hard to stop."

## FIGHT THE URGE

You may also find yourself wanting a cigarette when you feel certain ways. Maybe you are stressed out, gloomy, happy, or relaxed.

To quit, you'll need new routines. You'll need to find ways to get through the urges to smoke without lighting up.

By Kendall K. Morgan

Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO, MS, WebMD Medical Reviewer

It's especially important to quit smoking when you're pregnant or trying to get pregnant. But quitting isn't easy.

Understanding what makes quitting hard may help you go easier on yourself. It may also help you find a way around the challenges and say goodbye to smoking. Beating yourself up isn't the solution.

## SMOKING IS ADDICTIVE

Nicotine is highly addictive, says Humberto Choi, MD, a pulmonologist at Cleveland Clinic's main campus in Ohio.

"Many people smoke for a long time," Choi says. "Over time, you develop tolerance to nicotine. You'll need to smoke more to get the same effect."

## YOUR BRAIN ON NICOTINE

When you smoke, nicotine goes quickly to your brain. Once there, your brain releases other chemicals that give you a good feeling. As you get used to that, your brain actually starts to work differently.

Without nicotine, you may feel anxious or upset. You may find it hard to think or sleep. It will get better over time. But if you're struggling to get through this stage, ask your doctor for help.

## BREAK THE HABIT

You probably smoke at certain times of the day or during or after certain activities.

"When you talk to people who smoke and have a hard time [quitting], it's not only the nicotine but also the habit," Choi says. "They associate smoking when drinking coffee,

## TRY, TRY AGAIN

What if you've tried to quit before and it didn't work? You're in good company. Most people who've quit tried more than once before they stopped smoking for good, Choi says.

"People tend to think it's not working or never going to work and feel they don't want to try again," Choi says.

But, he says, you shouldn't expect immediate success. It may take weeks, months, or another try. But it's never too late to improve your health and that of your children by quitting.

## TIPS TO QUIT

**Make a plan to get through the tough moments. Try the below:**

- + Ask your doctor for advice.
- + Go to [Women.SmokeFree.gov](https://www.women.smokefree.gov) for information and resources.
- + Text Mom to 222888 to join the text messaging program **SmokeFreeMom**.
- + Join an online or local support group.
- + Download an app to help you track your cravings and see your progress.
- + Call **800-Quit-Now** for helpful information and support.

Inclusion of these organizations does not constitute an endorsement by WebMD and no endorsement is implied.

# I QUIT COLD TURKEY

A positive pregnancy test helped me kick smoking for good

By Jill Joyner Reviewed by Neha Pathak, MD, WebMD Chief Physician Editor



Jill Joyner with her son, Tucker, in Decatur, Georgia, in 2002.

It only took one overnight visit to a college campus when I was 15 to get hooked on smoking. The woman I stayed with on campus was a smoker, and I thought she was incredibly cool, so I followed her lead. Addictive personality runs in my family, so it wasn't long before I had a nicotine problem.

## BABY ON THE WAY

Fast-forward 17 years: My husband and I were trying to get pregnant, and I was still smoking. But the morning I tested positive, I finally decided that was it. I had one more cigarette, and then I said, "I'm done." I knew smoking was not good for me and definitely not good for the baby.

At that time in the early 2000s, there were fewer options to aid you if you wanted to quit smoking than there are now. So I decided I would just do it cold turkey. I wanted to be fully done with nicotine. My husband quit alongside me, which was immensely helpful. Having someone else go through the process at the same time was pivotal.

Of course, it wasn't easy. My strategy was to stay busy. I threw myself into

work, cleaning, gardening, and going on walks. The hardest time for me was the evening because that's when my husband and I would sit outside on our porch, smoke, and catch up on our days.

So we shifted our pattern: We'd have dinner and then go on an hour-long walk. After that, my first-trimester body was ready for bed, and I would have successfully avoided smoking for another day.

## SUCCESS STORY

My children, Tucker and Camille, are

now 23 and 20 years old, and we're all healthy and thriving. Quitting smoking required social support and breaking patterns, but also key was my mindset. It was not my first attempt at quitting, but pregnancy gave me a mental fortitude I hadn't had before.

At 32, I was older than a lot of first-time moms, and I just kept thinking that of all the factors that could negatively impact pregnancy at my age, smoking was one totally under my control. I wanted to eliminate that risk factor altogether. And I'm so glad I did.

## JILL'S TIPS



**+ Use tools.** There are so many more smoking cessation options available now than there were in 2001. Ask your doctor about them.

**+ Lean in.** Surround yourself with people that don't smoke and are going to support your decision not to smoke.

**+ Redo routines.** Pinpoint your typical smoking times and find a fun activity to take their place.

# THE DANGERS OF SMOKING DURING AND AFTER PREGNANCY

## What you should know

By Stephanie Watson

Reviewed by Melinda Ratini, DO, MS, WebMD Medical Reviewer

Everything you do when you're pregnant, your growing baby does, too. When you smoke, thousands of harmful chemicals make their way across the placenta to your baby. One of those chemicals, carbon monoxide, depletes your body of oxygen.

"Babies need a lot of oxygen," says Emily Adhikari, MD, an assistant professor at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas who specializes in maternal-fetal medicine. "Babies who don't get enough oxygen don't grow."

Many of the risks that are linked to smoking during pregnancy—including low birthweight, miscarriage, stillbirth, and premature delivery (before 37 weeks)—happen from a lack of oxygen, blood flow, and nutrition to your growing baby, says Katrina S. Mark, MD, an OB/GYN at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore.

Babies born to moms who smoke also have more birth defects like cleft lip and cleft palate. These openings in the upper lip or roof of the mouth affect your baby's ability to eat, and they may need to be corrected with surgery.

Smoking is dangerous for you, too. "It carries all the risks that it carried before pregnancy, but additionally, the respiratory risks to mom are increased," Mark says. Smoking lowers your lung capacity and makes it harder for you to breathe.

Having other smokers in the house is also a problem. Babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to be born small or with birth defects.

### RISKS AS YOUR BABY GROWS

The dangers of smoking during pregnancy don't disappear once your baby arrives. "Children who are born to mothers who smoke are at increased risk



for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)," says Kecia Gaither, MD, director of perinatal services and director of maternal fetal medicine at NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln in the Bronx, NY. "As these children grow, they're

### WOMEN STILL SMOKE DURING PREGNANCY

Despite the risks involved, about 1 in 14 pregnant women smoke cigarettes during their pregnancy, according to the CDC. If you are one of them, talk to your doctor for help quitting today.



## THE EFFECTS OF SMOKING ON CHILDREN

**Kids born to mothers who smoke are at increased risk for these problems as they grow:**

- + Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- + Obesity
- + High blood pressure
- + Type 2 diabetes
- + Asthma
- + Behavior problems

more likely to develop respiratory infections and asthma because the tobacco smoke affected their lung development.”

Damage to the baby’s brain in utero can continue to cause problems later in life. Children of smokers are slower to reach milestones and to learn. They also have more behavior problems than their peers.

### WHEN AND HOW TO QUIT

The best time to quit is before you start trying to conceive. Smoking can affect fertility, making it harder for you to get pregnant.

Mark suggests giving yourself at least 30 smoke-free days. Not only are those first 30 days the hardest when you’re trying to quit, but a month will give your body a chance to get back to normal. But, she adds, “Anytime somebody is willing to quit is a good time.” Even late in your pregnancy, quitting can improve the blood flow your baby needs to grow.

While counseling is the preferred treatment for pregnant women who smoke, talk to your doctor about nicotine replacement products such as a nicotine receptor blocker or an antidepressant that has nicotine receptor-blocking activity. When used during pregnancy, these drugs do not have an increased risk of major birth defects. And while these options are not risk-free, they work better than quitting cold turkey.

Combining these methods with counseling can increase your odds of success. But ultimately, the best smoking cessation technique is the one that works for you.

Be patient with yourself as you try to quit. “I take care of pregnant people who use all manner of drugs, and nicotine is the one that is the hardest to stop,” Mark says. “People should not feel ashamed or defeated if they need support. It’s a process.”

# A FAMILY AFFAIR

Make your new health habits a whole family matter

By Rachel Reiff Ellis

Reviewed by Brunilda Nazario, MD,  
WebMD Chief Physician Editor, Medical Affairs

**K**icking a smoking habit is not a one-time action, it's a longtime lifestyle shift. When your loved ones are part of the plan, it can set you up for lasting success.

## ASSEMBLE YOUR SQUAD

When you've committed to quit, don't keep that decision to yourself. Build a group to help get you through the rough parts. Think through who you'd like on your side, whether that's parents, co-workers, friends, a spiritual community, or a partner. Talk openly and honestly about what you've embarked on and concrete ways they can help.

"Tobacco use and dependence is a chronic, relapsing condition that often requires repeated intervention and long-term support," says Jennifer Folkenroth, senior director of nationwide tobacco programs at the American Lung Association. "No person should have to face the challenges of quitting alone."

## TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

When you approach quitting as a group activity, the benefits are far-reaching.

"When someone takes the big step of deciding to quit tobacco use, family and friends can play a critical role in giving their help and support throughout the quit process," Folkenroth says.

In fact, she says, research consistently shows that having strong family support may significantly increase the success rate of quitting smoking and having it stick. The positive reinforcement, encouragement, and accountability family provides can help you turn away from smoking both in the moment and for good.

## GIVE THEM GUIDANCE

**Tips for helping your loved ones help you quit.**

- + **Tell them what you need.** If you aren't sure, brainstorm together.
- + **Set up rewards.** Celebrate small wins—a week or month smoke-free—with a fun outing.
- + **Plan distractions.** Spend time together at the most triggering times.

# WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Find direction in advice from an expert

By Rachel Reiff Ellis Reviewed by Brunilda Nazario, MD, WebMD Chief Physician Editor, Medical Affairs

**T**rying to quit smoking can sometimes feel like pushing a boulder up a hill. But even though it's hard at times, you *can* do it. Use these uplifting words as motivation for your journey.

## SET A DATE

If you haven't already, give yourself a concrete goal to work toward. Talk to your doctor or other guiding voice to help you decide when that might realistically be.

"Make sure you choose a day that gives you enough time to prepare mentally, physically, and emotionally," says Michael Kosloski, tobacco treatment specialist at RWJBarnabas Health in Philadelphia.

Some people find that starting at the "beginning"—the first day of the week, month, or year—is a good way to kick off a new habit.

## FIGURE OUT WHAT TRIGGERS YOU

Like most habits, smoking happens at regular times, some of which you may not be aware of. Take some time to note when you crave a cigarette and write it down. When those moments arrive in the future, you'll be prepared with preventative measures.

"Common triggers include being around other smokers, drinking alcohol or coffee, and stress," Kosloski says.

## FIND A BUDDY

Make sure you have a support system to encourage you and lift you up when the going gets tough.

"Having a support system can make all the difference when you're trying to quit," Kosloski says.

If you have a friend who's in the same boat as you are, you can be accountability partners and find new hobbies

and habits together. Support groups are another lifeline for those looking to change their lifestyle for good.

## RECOGNIZE YOUR WINS

Quitting smoking is hard work, so be sure you're marking success, no matter how small, says Kosloski.

One way to do this is to set aside some of the money you would have spent on cigarettes and use it to buy something that brings you joy. Take yourself or a loved one out for a nice dinner, or treat yourself to a concert or other outing.

"You're doing a difficult thing, but you will get there," Kosloski says. "Keep going."





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