**Commit to the QUIT ­– let Vitality help**

Smoking is one of the most damaging activities for our health, contributing significantly to non-communicable diseases including cancer, heart disease, stroke, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. In 2022, the World Health Organization reported that tobacco kills more than 8 million people each year – 7 million from direct tobacco use and around 1.2 million from exposure to second-hand smoke[[1]](#footnote-1).

The good news is that it’s never too late to stop smoking because your lungs start to recover almost as soon as you quit. Within minutes of smoking your last cigarette, your body starts to recover[[2]](#footnote-2):

***20 minutes after quitting***

Your heart rate and blood pressure drop

***2 days after quitting***

Your internal carbon monoxide and oxygen levels return to normal

***2 weeks to 3 months after quitting***

Your circulation improves and your lung function increases

***2 to 12 months after quitting***

You cough less and your lungs are better able to handle mucus and self-clean

***1 to 2 years after quitting***

Your risk of having a heart attack decreases significantly

***5 to 10 years after quitting***

Your risk of cancer of the mouth, throat and larynx is cut by 50% and your risk of stoke decreases too

***10 years after quitting***

Your risk of lung cancer is about half than that of a smoker

***15 years after quitting***

Your risk of heart disease is close to that of a non-smoker (well done!)

Health benefits aside, quitting smoking helps food taste better, your breath, hair and clothes smell better and means your teeth and fingernails stop yellowing. You’ll also prevent premature wrinkling of your skin.

**So, after all those perks, if you’re looking for a little extra nudge to go smoke-free, keep reading.**

An effective strategy to help kick bad habits like smoking is to replace them with new, healthy ones. That’s where we come in.

**The commitment to quit**

We are hard-wired to focus on the now – known as our present bias – which can make investing in our future selves, and our future health, tricky. But there is a way to counteract this behavioural bias. Enter commitment devices. An effective way to lock ourselves into following a plan of action that we may not want to do but know is good for us. Sign a non-smoking pledge, tell your friends and family that you’ve quit and declare it on social media.

**Make smoking *less* salient**

The salience bias shows that we are more likely to focus on things that are more prominent and ignore those that are less so. This links to the well-known saying “out of sight, out of mind”. Knowing this, reinforce healthy habits by removing your smoking triggers such as cigarette boxes, ash trays, your regular smoking spots, drinking coffee or alcohol or feeling stressed.

**Change up your routine**

A habit is, by definition, a regular practice that is hard to give up. Try switching up your routine and find new habits to replace smoking such as going for a walk or heading to the gym. Exercise has shown to curb nicotine cravings and reduce some of the withdrawal symptoms that you may experience[[3]](#footnote-3).

**Spend time with non-smokers**

You are influenced by the people around you. There are several behavioural biases at play when it comes to social influence – the bandwagon effect, FOMO and social proof being the main ones. Use these to your advantage. If you want to quit smoking, socialise more with non-smoking friends, colleagues and family members or join a quit smoking group and surround yourself with people who have similar goals.

**Invest in yourself**

We are more invested in not losing something as opposed to gaining something – a principle called loss aversion *–* and it’s more powerful than you may think. So, if you want to stop smoking this year, buy your nicotine gum, lozenges or patches upfront or sign up for one of Vitality’s cessation programmes ([Quit Genius](https://www.discovery.co.za/vitality/smoking-cessation#quitgenius), [Allen Carr](https://www.discovery.co.za/vitality/smoking-cessation#allencarr), [GoSmokeFree](https://www.discovery.co.za/vitality/smoking-cessation#gosmokefree)). The chances of you following through with something that you have already invested in are far greater.

**Track the stats**

Feedback is crucial. We have an information bias which is our tendency to seek out information even when that information may not affect action. Something as simple as seeing your progress statistics, however small or slow they may be, can go a long way in affirming your changed behaviour. Leverage technology to help with this. Use apps to track the (often invisible) benefits of your smoking cessation by getting regular feedback on metrics such as gum texture, coughing and wheezing and reduced risk of heart disease. These ‘quantifiable’ stats are very persuasive and let you know that what you are embarking on is worth it.

**Your future self is ready to thank you for quitting.**

Make ‘you’ proud.

1. WHO, 2022. Tobacco factsheet. [Link](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Anstey *et al*., (2007) Smoking as a risk factor for dementia and cognitive decline; CDC (2020) Tobacco-Related Mortality; WHO (2020) Smoking and COVID-19; NHS (2021) Stopping smoking for your mental health; WHO (2021) Quitting Toolkit; WHO (2021) More than 100 reasons to quit tobacco [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Medical news Today, 2018. How exercise can help you to quit smoking. [Link](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/320484) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)