



Lifesaving Tips About...

Smoking and PAD

Smoking is a major cause of heart disease, cancer, and lung disease and the leading cause of peripheral artery disease (PAD). Studies show that smoking half a pack of cigarettes every day may increase the risk of PAD by 30 to 50%. But why?

Nicotine in cigarette smoke is a **vasoconstrictor**, which means that it causes blood vessels to narrow. This can lead to faster plaque buildup in artery walls, which worsens the risk for blockages in your leg arteries.

Prolonged smoking can worsen PAD symptoms. Smoking also significantly increases the risk for leg pain (or **claudication**), limb loss due to amputation, or having a heart attack or stroke.

How Can Quitting Smoking Help?

Quitting smoking may be the most important lifesaving step a person with PAD can take. Not only will smoking cessation improve your PAD symptoms, but it will also:

- Significantly lower your blood pressure, reduce shortness of breath, and improve breathing
- Increase the flow of blood to your limbs or extremities to reduce your risk for foot ulcers, eye problems, nerve damage, and kidney disease. This is very important, especially if you have diabetes.
- Lower your overall risk for cancer of the mouth, throat, lungs, and bladder

How Can You Quit Smoking?

Have you ever tried to quit smoking and failed? You are not alone. Smoking is a habit developed over several years.

Slowing and stopping this habit will take time and patience. But each year, millions of smokers are able to make changes to their habits, by reducing the number of cigarettes they smoke, or quitting altogether. Here are a few reasons for their success:

- Better resources are available for people who want to quit smoking.
- Medicines can help support or curb cravings.
- They have realized the importance of quitting or abstaining for themselves.

For more information, review these related flyers:

- Lifesaving Tips About ... High Blood Pressure and PAD
- What Is Peripheral Artery Disease?

Studies show that when people follow these steps, they increase their chances of quitting smoking:



Step 1: Prepare Yourself Mentally

Write down your reasons for quitting. Try

answering these questions:

- What will the benefits be?
- Why is it important to me?
- What has worked for me in the past and what made quitting difficult?
- What are my triggers to smoke?

You can use the “My Smoking Action Plan” to write down your thoughts. If you feel that you are ready to try, set a quit date within the next 30, 60, or 90 days from the day you would like to start your smoking cessation journey. Mark it on your calendar.



Step 2: Connect with Your Health Care Provider

Make an appointment

with your provider to talk about a smoking cessation program that is right for you. Ask your health care provider what can be expected such as potential symptoms of withdrawal.

Talk with your provider about your anticipated “quit date” and ask about resources to help support your journey. For example, counseling or certain medications can help.



Step 3: Talk with Your Support System

When you are ready,

discuss your decision to quit smoking with family, friends, or caregivers. Here are some ways to ask for their support:

- Ask them not to smoke around you or leave cigarettes or the boxes where you can see them.
- Ask a trusted friend, caregiver, or loved one if you can call them when you are struggling.
- Ask for help to clear your home, office space, and vehicle of any smoking or cigarette products.



TRIGGERS AND COPING STRATEGIES

Quitting a long-term habit can be challenging and difficult, but possible with a plan. Set yourself up for success by expecting that it will be hard at times. Here are some strategies that can help:

- Avoid people who use tobacco or ask them not to smoke around you.
- Find support groups or establish friendships with people who don't smoke.

- Avoid smoke breaks and other social situations where people may be smoking.
- Find other ways to manage stress. If you're feeling restless, go for a short walk. Even a five-minute walk outside or walking in place can help. You can also try chewing sugar-free gum or distracting yourself by calling a friend.

Resources: *A Practical Guide to Help Your Patients Quit Tobacco*, cdc.gov

