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# Preparing To Quit And Quitting: How To Stay Thin Without Cigarettes

**M**any people are concerned that they will gain weight if they quit smoking. Concern about weight gain is a major reason many people, especially women, continue to smoke. In these pages, you'll learn some strategies for preventing and handling weight gain as you quit smoking.

## Does Smoking Actually Keep You Thin?

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It's true, there is a connection between body weight and cigarette smoke. Tobacco smoke contains over 2,000 chemicals. When animals are exposed to these chemicals they either don't grow well or they lose weight. This is called a "toxic effect"—a poison, in other words. People respond to the toxic chemicals in cigarette smoke in much the same way. Smokers' thin bodies do not reflect good health. Instead thinness literally means that smokers are being poisoned.

If you smoke, nicotine is the chemical primarily responsible for keeping you thin. It makes your blood pressure rise and your heartbeat increase. As a result, your metabolism runs faster than it should. When you stop smoking, your body reacts by getting healthier. Your metabolism returns to normal, which means that you will burn slightly fewer calories than when you were smoking. Another signal that your body is recovering is an increase in appetite. Smoking dulls your sense of smell and taste. As these senses come alive again, food may seem more appealing than before. All these factors can add up to a few extra pounds.

But, there's good news. You can prevent weight gain by adopting healthy eating and exercise habits before you quit. Exercise will provide the faster metabolism you got used to when you smoked. Even if you do gain some weight, it's likely to be minimal—5 to 8 pounds. Putting on more than 10 pounds is rare. There will be time to take off the extra weight once your non-smoking habit is well established.

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# Two Keys To Preventing Weight Gain When You Quit

There are two things that can help you prevent or minimize weight gain when you stop smoking:

- Plan healthy but filling meals and snacks.
- Find ways to fit a little more physical activity into your life.

Take a moment to think about any time(s) that you tried to stop smoking.

- Did your eating habits change? \_\_\_\_\_
- Did your activity level change? \_\_\_\_\_
- Did your weight change? \_\_\_\_\_

By looking at your answers to the questions above, you may be able to see if a change in eating or activity seemed to contribute to any weight gain when you tried to stop smoking.

If your activity and eating didn't change at all, the weight gain would have been the result of a change in metabolism. This time, you'll want to get plenty of activity to help keep your metabolism "faster" when you quit.

If you gained weight as a result of eating more food or higher calorie foods, you'll want to carefully plan the foods you're going to eat during the quitting period.

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# Planning Meals And Snacks

If you plan ahead to eat filling meals and snacks that are not high in calories, you're more likely to eat in such a way that you won't gain much weight when you quit smoking. With a plan in hand, you'll be much less likely to reach for the potato chips in your cupboard or the premium ice cream in your freezer. In fact, you'll be less likely to have those things in your house to begin with!

Use the chart below to practice planning out your meals for a week. Do this well before you quit. Then, try to follow your plan as closely as you can. When your quit day approaches, plan out your meals and snacks for at least the first two weeks. That way, you won't have to think about what you're going to eat while you're going through the hardest part of the quitting process.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast						
Snack						
Lunch						
Snack						
Dinner						
Snack						

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## Using Up More Energy

When your body isn't spending calories trying to get rid of toxic tobacco chemicals, it has more energy for other things.

There are many ways for you to use up that extra energy. You don't have to become a marathon runner. Just try to move your body more often and a little more vigorously throughout the day. Here are a few ideas:

- Use stairs instead of elevators or escalators.
- Park a little farther away in the parking lot.
- When you take a coffee break, walk the length of the building or up and down a staircase.
- Get up and stretch out from time to time (this will help your alertness and help prevent aches and pains, too).
- Take a short walk, or put on some music and dance, after you eat supper.

What are some of your ideas for using up more calories throughout your day?

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## What About Cravings?

When you quit, you may find that you have a strong appetite for one or more "junk" foods such as chocolate or potato chips.

It's quite normal to have an appetite for something to replace the enjoyment you used to find in cigarettes. As long as you stick to a balanced diet made up of nutrient-rich foods, and choose healthy, low-calorie snacks the majority of the time, an *occasional* junk food item is not a problem. If you can eat a small portion of the food you crave, savoring every bite, go for it!

Another option is to try reduced-calorie versions of the foods you crave. This way, you can eat a little more for the same number of calories.

However, if your craving is the type that causes you to "pig out" (you start and can't stop), then you may need to adopt a different strategy. Keep the food out of your home and workplace altogether, or only buy very small quantities of it. If your craving is for a food away from home, such as a donut shop, you may even need to avoid driving past that location for a couple of weeks.

Did you ever have "cravings" for specific foods when you tried to quit? How might you address those cravings this time?

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## A Stimulating Experience...

You may find yourself drinking more coffee, tea and colas after you quit smoking. These beverages contain caffeine. They give you a lift similar to the effect of cigarettes. Therefore, it makes sense that you would be drawn to these beverages while you're adjusting to life without nicotine.

From a weight-control point of view, these beverages are not a problem as long as you choose diet colas, sugar substitutes, and low-fat milk for your coffee or tea.

These drinks do present a danger for some people as they are trying to quit smoking, however. In the past, these beverages were linked to smoking—a cup of coffee and a cigarette. Drinking these things can bring on a smoking urge.

For other people, temporarily drinking more of these beverages is not a problem. The extra caffeine can help them get over the "hump" of quitting smoking.

You'll have to decide whether drinking caffeinated beverages will make quitting smoking easier or harder for you.

What did you experience the last time you tried to quit?

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## Positive Thinking

Your thinking patterns will also help you prevent weight gain. For example, look at the following situation and two ways to respond. Practice thinking “thinner” thoughts now, before you quit.

**Situation:** A craving strikes.

**First Thought:** "This craving is driving me nuts. It's either chocolate or cigarettes. I'll go to the vending machine and get a chocolate bar."

**A "Thinner" Way to Think:** "I really want something chocolate right now, but I don't want to gain a lot of weight. I'll have some low-fat chocolate frozen yogurt with chocolate syrup—lots of chocolate, not much fat and not too many calories. Then I'll go for a walk!"

What is one situation that could lead you to eat in a way that could cause weight gain?

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What kinds of “thinner” thoughts might you try, when you get into that situation?

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## Summing It Up

Planning ahead, adding activity, thinking “thin,” and having a strategy for cravings—these are the tools that will help you quit smoking without gaining much weight. These same tools will also help you take off any weight you do gain. Good luck!