

Dealing with Urges to Smoke

As an ex-smoker, you'll have urges to smoke. Sometimes the urges are physical, as if your body needs a cigarette. At other times, they'll be mental — feeling like you deserve a cigarette. And sometimes you may want to smoke because it's a habit.

Physical Urges

As a smoker, you became addicted to the nicotine in cigarettes. Nicotine can create good feelings that make you want to smoke more. But it also creates bad feelings when you try to cut back. Physical urges are one way your body tells you it wants nicotine. This "craving" for nicotine is part of the withdrawal process, along with symptoms such as headaches and feeling tired or lightheaded. These symptoms go away after one or two weeks, but the urges may keep coming for awhile. As time passes, you'll have fewer physical urges to smoke.

Tip: Time your smoking urges. They will probably last a minute or less.

Mental Urges

Did you used to reach for a cigarette when you were nervous? Or to help you relax? Or as a reward? If so, you may still want a cigarette at those times.

Habit

Smoking is a habit you can change. You learned to use cigarettes to feel "normal." Now you must re-train yourself. In time, you'll feel normal without cigarettes.

- **Identify triggers.** Think about times when you want a cigarette.
- Select coping skills. How will you cope with each of your trigger situations?
- Put your plan into action. Review the plan, practice and be ready to act when you feel an urge to smoke.

Planning for Urges

Smoking urges can take you by surprise, so it helps to plan for them.

Use the No-Smoking Confidence Assessment and Tips tool to:

Step 1: Identify Triggers

Read through the 14 situations in the [Confidence Assessment](#). If you're absolutely certain that you would not smoke in a certain situation, write "100%" on the Confidence Score line. If you think you'd have a hard time resisting smoking, assign a low percentage. If you aren't sure, pick a number somewhere in the middle.

Step 2: Select Coping Skills

You've just identified the situations that are riskiest for you. The next step is to figure out how you'll cope with each one of them. Read the list of tips under each of your risky situations. Decide which tips are most likely to work for you. Mark them with a check so you can find them quickly when you need them. Review your list of tips every day or two so you'll be prepared when a problem situation arises. You may find that some situations you thought would be hard weren't. And you might have trouble with situations you thought you could handle. Take the Confidence Assessment periodically to see how you're doing. Also, visit our [Stress Management website](#) to learn ways of handling stress (triggers).

[Learn more ways of handling the stress of not smoking.](#)

Step 3: Put Your Plan Into Action

Now review your plans and prepare to use them.

- Do you need to stock up on anything such as gum, hard candies, healthy snacks, books, videos or projects?
- Is there anyone you want to talk with about your plans?
- Is there anything you can practice? Try out the tips you chose to see if they work for you.