

## Weight Gain and Quitting Tobacco:

### Put Yourself in Control!

The Good News: Not everyone gains weight when they stop using tobacco.

The Not-So-Bad News: On average, people who quit tobacco gain only about 10 pounds.

The Bad News: You are more likely to gain weight when you stop using tobacco if you have used tobacco for 10 to 20 years **and you DO NOT change your exercise and eating habits!**

**The Great News:** You can control your weight while you quit tobacco use by making healthy eating and physical activity a part of your new tobacco-free life. Although you might gain a few pounds, remember you have stopped smoking and/or dipping and taken a big step toward a healthier life.

### What causes weight gain after quitting?

When nicotine, a chemical in all forms of tobacco, leaves your body, you may experience:

- Short-term weight gain. The nicotine kept your body weight low, and when you quit tobacco, your body returns to the weight it would have been had you never used tobacco.
- You might gain 3 to 5 pounds due to water retention during the first week after quitting.
- A need for fewer calories. After you stop using tobacco, you may use fewer calories than when you were using tobacco.

### Will this weight gain hurt my health?

The health risks of using tobacco are far greater than the risks of gaining 5 to 10 pounds. Tobacco use causes more than 500,000 deaths each year in the United States. You would have to gain about 100 to 150 pounds after quitting to make your health risks as high as when you used tobacco.

### What Can I Do to Avoid Gaining Weight When I Quit Using Tobacco?

To avoid gaining weight when you quit tobacco use, you need to become more physically active and improve your eating habits *before* you stop. Physical activity helps to control your weight by increasing the number of calories your body uses. Making healthy changes to your eating habits will prevent weight gain by controlling the amount of calories you eat. Try to reduce your chances of gaining weight by being more physically active and improving your eating habits *before* you stop smoking or dipping.

### Become More Physically Active.

Becoming physically active is a healthy way to control your weight and take your mind off tobacco. In one study, women who stopped smoking and added 45 minutes of walking a day gained less than 3 pounds. In addition to helping control your weight, exercise

increases your energy, promotes self-confidence, improves your health, and may help relieve the stress and depression caused by the lack of nicotine in your body.

You can become more physically active by spending less time doing activities that use little energy, like watching television and playing video games, and spending more time doing physical activities. Try to do at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day on most days of the week. The activity does not have to be done all at once. It can be done in short spurts -- 10 minutes here, 20 minute there -- as long as it adds up to 30 minutes a day. Simple ways to become more physically active include gardening, housework, mowing the lawn, playing actively with children, and taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

### **Improve Your Eating Habits.**

Try to gradually improve your eating habits. Changing your eating habits too quickly can add to the stress you may feel as you try to quit tobacco use. Eating a variety of foods is a good way to improve your health. To make sure you get all of the nutrients needed for good health, choose a variety of foods from each group in the Food Guide Pyramid (pictured below) each day. The Nutrition Facts Label that is found on most processed food products can also help you select foods that meet your daily nutritional needs. For a healthy diet, use the Pyramid to guide your daily food choices and make sure you:

- Eat plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits.
- Choose lean and lowfat foods and low-calorie beverages most often. Choose lowfat dairy products, lean meats, fish, poultry, and dry beans to get the nutrients you need without extra calories and fat.
- Choose less often foods high in fat and sugars and low in nutrients.

### **After You Quit**

**Learn how to reduce cravings for both tobacco and food.** Once you stop tobacco use, it is important to learn how to handle cravings for cigarettes/dip and food. Remember, a craving only lasts about 5 minutes. Consider these actions to help deal with your cravings.

- **Replace tobacco use with other activities.** Snack on fruit or sugarless gum to satisfy any sweet cravings. Keep your hands busy. Replace the action of holding cigarettes with activities like doodling, working puzzles, knitting, twirling a straw, or holding a pen or pencil.
- **Drink less caffeine.** Try to avoid drinking beverages that contain caffeine, such as sodas. Nicotine withdrawal will make you feel jittery and nervous, and the caffeine may only make nicotine withdrawal worse.
- **Get enough sleep.** When you feel tired, you are more likely to crave tobacco and food.
- **Reduce tension.** To help relieve tension, relax by meditating, taking a walk, soaking in the tub, or taking deep breaths. Find something that will help you relax and replace the urge to use tobacco.

- **Get support and encouragement.** You need a lot of support when you quit tobacco. Talk to a friend when you get the urge to use tobacco. You can also participate in free tobacco cessation classes offered by the Wellness Center and at the Fisher Branch Dental Clinic. If you can, find a friend to quit with you for mutual support.
- **Talk to your doctor about nicotine replacement.** If you have significant withdrawal symptoms or are concerned about weight gain, talk to your healthcare provider. Some nicotine replacement products, formerly available by prescription only, are now available over the counter. Using nicotine gum or a nicotine patch, along with improved eating habits and physical activity, will help you reduce your risk of a tobacco relapse. Nicotine gum has been shown to delay weight gain after quitting. You may also want to talk to your doctor about prescription medications, such as Zyban, that are available to help you quit tobacco.
- **Try not to do things that tempt you to use tobacco or eat when you are not hungry.** Keep a journal of where and when you feel most tempted to use tobacco and avoid these situations. Substitute healthy activities for tobacco use to help you avoid the urge to smoke or chew or eat when you are not hungry.

**Try not to panic about modest weight gain.** Accept some weight gain as a normal result of the nicotine leaving your body. Know that quitting smoking is the best thing that you can do for you and those around you. If possible, before you quit, prepare a plan to quit tobacco that includes simple changes in your eating and exercise habits. Improving your lifestyle as you stop tobacco use can help you prevent a large weight gain and become a healthy non-tobacco user.

For further help, you can obtain NIH Publication No. 98-4159 via the internet at <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/pubs/quitsmok/#1>