



to reduce your risk of heart
and circulatory diseases



Smoking and heart and circulatory diseases

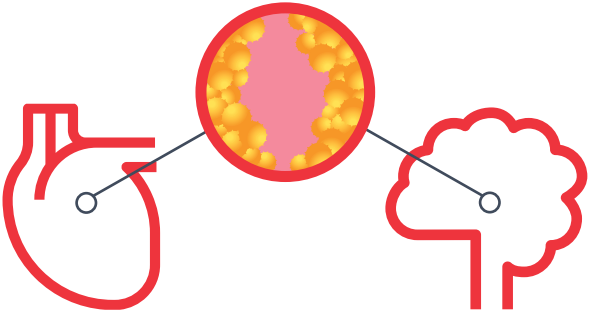
This leaflet is for people at increased risk of heart and circulatory diseases because they smoke.

The chemicals in cigarettes and other smoking products kill thousands of people in the UK every year.

The toxins in cigarettes affect your body while you're smoking and after the cigarette is finished. Giving up smoking is the best thing you can do for your health.

The chemicals in cigarettes damage the structure of your blood vessels, including the arteries that carry oxygen rich blood to your heart and brain.

Smoking makes the walls of your arteries sticky from the chemicals, so fatty material can stick to them. If the arteries that carry blood to your heart get damaged and clogged, it can lead to a heart attack. If this happens in the arteries that carry blood to your brain it can lead to a stroke.



Artery in the heart getting blocked

Artery in the brain getting blocked

Inside your arteries



Fatty build-up

Artery wall

100,000

Nearly 100,000 smokers in the UK die from smoking-related causes each year.

4,000



Just one cigarette has 4,000 toxic chemicals.

Chemicals in cigarettes

By giving up smoking, you protect your body from the harm of dangerous chemicals such as:

Carbon monoxide: This is a poisonous gas that you breathe in when you smoke. It means your blood cells can't carry oxygen around your body as well as they should. Having high levels of carbon monoxide in your blood greatly increases your risk of heart and circulatory diseases.

Tar: This is also in cigarette smoke and can cause cancer. When you breathe it in, 70% of the tar stays in your lungs and damages them. Cigarettes labelled 'light', 'mild' or 'low tar' are misleading. All cigarettes are bad for your health.

Nicotine: This is the addictive chemical found in cigarettes. It increases your heart rate and blood pressure. Untreated high blood pressure permanently damages your arteries and your heart.

Smoking alternatives

Some cigarette alternatives are worse for your health than others. Make sure you know how your habit is impacting your health.



E-cigarettes

E-cigarettes have been shown to be less harmful than regular cigarettes, but due to the nicotine, can still be addictive. They can be useful to help you quit smoking with support from Stop Smoking Services. More research is needed on the long-term health impacts of e-cigarettes.

‘Light’, ‘mild’ or ‘low-tar’ cigarettes

These are still bad for your health and often just as bad as regular cigarettes.

Smokeless tobacco

Alternatives like chewing tobacco can still cause cancer. If you use them you increase your risk of developing serious heart and circulatory diseases such as heart attack and stroke more than someone who doesn't use tobacco at all.

Shisha (waterpipe)

Shisha can still contain tobacco and other harmful chemicals including carbon monoxide, it is not good for your health.

Long term smokers

The good news is that it's never too late to quit smoking. Even if you've smoked for decades, quitting improves your long term health.

Quitting smoking – the effects it may have over time



Friends and family

Your family, friends and colleagues are at risk from your smoking.

Second-hand smoking (or passive smoking) is when you breathe in someone else's cigarette smoke. When the people around you breathe in your cigarette smoke, it increases their chance of getting heart and circulatory diseases, cancers and breathing problems.

How to quit

If you've decided to quit smoking, then you've made a great decision for your health. It may be difficult at times, but there is help available to you.

Make an appointment with your GP or practice nurse. Some pharmacies also offer stop smoking programmes. They will be able to help you find the best way to stop smoking and suggest medication or nicotine replacement therapy.

If you're struggling to quit, pay attention to the circumstances that make you want to smoke. If you always smoke when you're stressed, tired or drinking alcohol, plan ahead for these moments so you develop new ways to cope.

Look at other ways to stay motivated, like how much money you'll save or working on your fitness. Give yourself a goal like saving for a holiday or completing a physical challenge. This will help you kick the habit.

Many of the resources available are free to use and can help you quit in a way that will last. Even if you've tried and failed before, every fresh start counts.

Quick tips



Set a quit date and tell your friends and family. If there is a shopkeeper you always buy your cigarettes from, tell them too. This will help you stick to it.



Have healthy snacks and drinks to hand so you're not tempted to reach for unhealthy treats.



Keep track of the money you're saving by not buying cigarettes. Use it to give yourself a reward when you reach milestones to stay motivated.

Resources and helplines

NHS stop smoking services

These services offer free counselling and support to anyone who wants to quit smoking. You can go to group support sessions or, in some areas of the UK, you can have one-to-one support.

National stop smoking helplines and websites

England

smokefree.nhs.uk
0800 022 4 332

Northern Ireland

want2stop.info

Scotland

canstopsmoking.com
0800 84 84 84

Wales

stopsmokingwales.com
0800 085 2219

Heart transplants. Clot busting drugs. Pacemakers. Breakthroughs born from visionary medical research. Research you fund with your donations.

Heart and circulatory diseases kill 1 in 4 people in the UK. They cause heartbreak on every street. But if research can invent machines to restart hearts, fix arteries in newborn babies, build tiny devices to correct heartbeats, and give someone a heart they weren't born with – imagine what's next.

We fund research into all heart and circulatory diseases and their risk factors. Heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, vascular dementia, diabetes and many more. All connected, all under our microscope. Our research is the promise of future prevention, cures and treatments.

The promise to protect the people we love. Our children. Our parents. Our brothers. Our sisters. Our grandparents. Our closest friends.

You and the British Heart Foundation. Together, we will beat heartbreak forever.

Beat heartbreak forever.