



WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS INFORMATION SHEET

Quitting tobacco use brings about a variety of physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms. Most of these symptoms decrease sharply during the first few days after quitting, followed by a continued but slower decline in symptoms during the 2nd and 3rd weeks after quitting. For some people, coping with withdrawal symptoms is like riding a roller coaster—there may be sharp turns, slow climbs, and unexpected plunges. **Most symptoms pass within 2 to 4 weeks after quitting.** Report new symptoms to your health-care provider, especially if severe. Consider the impact of recent medication changes.

SYMPTOM	CAUSE	DURATION	RELIEF
Chest tightness	Tightness is likely due to tension created by the body's need for nicotine or may be caused by sore muscles from coughing.	A few days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use relaxation techniques ▪ Try deep breathing ▪ Use of NRT may help
Constipation, stomach pain, gas	Intestinal movement decreases for a brief period.	1–2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drink plenty of fluids ▪ Add fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain cereals to diet
Cough, dry throat, nasal drip	The body is getting rid of mucus, which has blocked airways and restricted breathing.	A few days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drink plenty of fluids ▪ Avoid additional stress during first few weeks
Craving for a cigarette	Nicotine is a strongly addictive drug, and withdrawal causes cravings.	Frequent for 2–3 days; can happen for months or years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wait out the urge, which lasts only a few minutes ▪ Distract yourself ▪ Exercise (take walks) ▪ Use of NRT may help
Depressed mood	It is normal to feel sad for a period of time after you first quit smoking. Many people have a strong urge to smoke when they feel depressed.	1–2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase pleasurable activities ▪ Talk with your clinician about changes in your mood when quitting ▪ Get extra support from friends and family
Difficulty concentrating	The body needs time to adjust to not having constant stimulation from nicotine.	A few weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plan workload accordingly ▪ Avoid additional stress during first few weeks
Dizziness	The body is getting extra oxygen.	1–2 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use extra caution ▪ Change positions slowly
Fatigue	Nicotine is a stimulant.	2–4 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take naps ▪ Do not push yourself ▪ Use of NRT may help
Hunger	Cravings for a cigarette can be confused with hunger pangs; sensation may result from oral cravings or the desire for something in the mouth.	Up to several weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drink water or low-calorie liquids ▪ Be prepared with low-calorie snacks
Insomnia	Nicotine affects brain wave function and influences sleep patterns; coughing and dreams about smoking are common.	1 week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limit caffeine intake, the effects of which will increase with quitting smoking ▪ Use relaxation techniques
Irritability	The body's craving for nicotine can produce irritability.	2–4 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take walks ▪ Try hot baths ▪ Use relaxation techniques

Adapted from materials from the National Cancer Institute.