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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMPTOM</th>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>RELIEF</th>
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</table>
| 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                | - 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                | - 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                | - 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 | - Wait out the urge, which lasts only a few minutes  
- Distract yourself  
- Exercise (take walks)  
- Use of NRT may help  
- Increase pleasurable activities  
- Talk with your clinician about changes in your mood when quitting  
- Get extra support from friends and family |
| 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                | - 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                | - Plan workload accordingly  
- Avoid additional stress during first few weeks |
| Dizziness              | The body is getting extra oxygen.                                      | 1–2 days                 | - Use extra caution  
- Change positions slowly |
| Fatigue                | Nicotine is a stimulant.                                              | 2–4 weeks                | - 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      | - 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                   | - 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                | - Take walks  
- Try hot baths  
- Use relaxation techniques |

Adapted from materials from the National Cancer Institute.