

# Physical activity and smoking cessation

## BENEFITS OF EXERCISE WHEN QUITTING SMOKING

- A brisk five minute walk has been shown to reduce cigarette cravings as well as withdrawal symptoms
- Physical activity may help to reduce stress and tension associated with quitting smoking
- Exercising may help to minimise weight gain associated with smoking cessation
- Becoming more physically active may help you shift from seeing yourself as a smoker to an active and healthy non-smoker!
- Quitting smoking is often associated with increases in weight. Exercise can help you lose weight particularly if you combine this with eating healthy food.
- It helps build muscle which means you burn more calories even when you're not exercising.
- It helps protect you against other conditions which cause ill health, and which smokers are at greater risk of suffering like diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.
- Physical activity, along with a healthy diet, helps reduce stress and improves your overall feeling of wellbeing and quality of life, as well as helping you to sleep well.

## STAYING SAFE

If you get any of the following problems stop and ask for medical advice from your GP or contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647:

- Discomfort in your chest or upper body
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness brought on by physical activity

- Dizziness or nausea on exertion
- Fainting during or just after exercise
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.

### Identify what you enjoy

Figure out what types of activities you're most likely to stick with, as well as where, when and how often you'll do these activities.

### Identify potential barriers to being more active

Think about these barriers and explore ways to overcome them.

### Whatever you choose, set realistic goals and start small

Even a ten-minute walk can help lift your mood and refocus your thoughts away from smoking. For example, if you get a craving, walk around the block, or through your building.

### Join or visit your local YMCA, public gym or health club

Investigate what activities are available locally, find out if there are any schemes where you may be able to get help with paying for activities. Think about what you enjoy and explore the activities they offer that match your interests.

**Ask your GP about local exercise prescription or quit smoking schemes.**

## MORE INFORMATION

- NHS Smoking Helpline 0800 022 4 332 or visit [www.gosmokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.gosmokefree.nhs.uk)
- QUIT (UK charity for quitting smoking) 0800 002200 or [www.quit.org.uk](http://www.quit.org.uk)

## WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITY IS BEST?

While stamina-based activity is particularly important, you also need to include some strength and flexibility-based activity to get the best health gains.

**tStamina-type activities:** Walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, tennis or playing football or other sports

**Strength-type activities:** Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or mowing) and housework

**Flexibility-type activities:** Dancing, yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi and gardening

### Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk or go with a friend to make it more interesting, or you could use a pedometer to count your steps.
- Look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes out of your lunch break to go for a walk.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator, start by walking part of the way and gradually progress to walking up the whole way.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable.

## HOW MUCH AND HOW OFTEN?

### Frequency

Your main aim is to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 3 x 10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 2 x 15 minute walks and then 30 continuous minutes. One goal is to try and increase your activity by 2 minutes each day.

### Intensity

Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time.

### Advice

Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases for the first 10 minutes until you have reached the level you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.

### Remember

Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.