

WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS INFORMATION SHEET

Quitting tobacco use brings about a variety of physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms. 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 manifest within the first 1 to 2 days, peak within the first week, and subside within 2 to 4 weeks.** Report new symptoms to your health-care provider, especially if severe. Consider the impact of recent medication changes and your caffeine intake.

| 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 a nicotine medication 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 a nicotine medication 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 (and none after 12 noon), because its effects 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.