

Many smokers worry about putting on weight when they stop smoking.

But just what are the facts and what are the possible solutions?

Things smokers say:



“I’m already overweight and I’m worried that if I quit smoking, I’ll be the size of a house!” “My friend quit smoking and put on four stones. I’m terrified the same will happen to me if I stop smoking”



“How can I keep weight gain to a minimum after I stop smoking?”

“If you’re going to be unhealthily fat then surely you might as well smoke and stay slim?”

## The Facts <sup>2</sup>

About 70% of quitters find that their appetites increase for 10 weeks after they stop smoking. Fear of putting on weight prevents many people from trying to quit and causes others to relapse. It is important however to get this problem into perspective.

The average weight gain is between 3 and 10 lbs, but a lot depends on the individual. It is not inevitable that you will gain weight, particularly if you opt for low fat snacks in the first few weeks, monitor your weight as you go along and take regular exercise.

The health risks posed by smoking are far greater than those associated with moderate weight gain and continuing to smoke is no guarantee of a slim future. This is because, as they age, smokers tend to become less mobile and are less able to take aerobic exercise. Thus their energy output decreases, and unless they reduce the amount they eat, they tend to gain weight even though they continue to smoke. This is the worst case scenario as it means ending up overweight, unhealthy and at high risk of smoking-related diseases.

It is probably not a good idea to go on a strict diet at the same time as quitting smoking but rather to adopt a ‘first things first’ policy. Weight gain can be addressed later when you are safely through the first few weeks without cigarettes.

<sup>2</sup> Stop! The Stop! Smoking Cessation Counsellor’s Handbook – Nicola Willis 2000

<sup>1</sup> How to stop smoking and stay stopped (Kick the Habit – BBC) Martin Raw 2000

## Why do I put on weight when I stop smoking? <sup>2</sup>

- Nicotine reduces feelings of hunger so you feel hungrier when you stop smoking.
- Food tastes better when you don't smoke, so you eat more.
- A customary cigarette at the end of a meal is replaced by a second helping of food.
- Some people want to eat more sweet things.
- When you stop smoking few calories are used up and so weight increases if food intake remains the same.

## How can I help to avoid gaining weight? <sup>1</sup>

- Replace fatty foods with lower fat foods.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and beans (low in calories and fat and full of fibre so they will fill you up without making you fatter).
- Eat wholemeal bread (same calories as white bread but more filling). Spread the butter or margarine thinly.
- Eat chicken or white fish cooked without fat instead of red meat, sausages and bacon.
- Use lower fat varieties of dairy products – cheeses, milk and yoghurt.
- Try cutting down on sugar in tea or coffee, or replace it with an artificial sweetener.
- Look for 'diet' or sugar-free versions of soft drinks.
- Reduce alcohol consumption (alcohol is high in calories).
- Grill food instead of frying it.
- Fatty and sugary foods should only be eaten as occasional treats.
- Healthy snacks might include a supply of ready chopped fruit and vegetables, rice cakes, plain popcorn, fruit buns, dried fruit, bread sticks.
- Include regular exercise as part of your daily routine. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate activity every day eg brisk walking, cycling, swimming and dancing.

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