



If you smoke tobacco, once did, or have a family member or friend who does, you probably recognize the steep challenges involved with quitting. What's more, you likely realize that frightening statistics (smoking is the leading cause of preventable death) are no match for nicotine, one of the most addictive psychoactive substances.

Studies show it can take up to 30 unsuccessful attempts before a smoker finally slays this dragon. Which is why we encourage nicotine addicts to try and try again, despite repeated failures. The more one tries and fails, the better the odds of eventual success.

In recent years, many Americans have kicked this deadly habit. How did they do it? Well, there is actually a science to smoking cessation. Researchers have studied which methods tend to work best. Let's run down the list.

1. Because nicotine is highly addictive, consider using **replacement therapy**, such as gum or a patch, to gradually titrate down. This helps with cravings, but still fails to neutralize the ritualistic nature of smoking. Most tobacco users find the actual process of smoking enjoyable and relaxing, so nicotine replacement therapy does not address this habitual pattern, but it does assist with the physical withdrawal from nicotine itself.
2. **Exercise**, particularly the aerobic kind, is known to reduce nicotine cravings, not only while one is exercising, but for substantial periods afterward. Because exercise increases overall well-being, both mental and physical, it helps reinforce other health behaviors, such as sound nutrition and the avoidance of toxins, like tobacco.
3. **Mindfulness meditation** appears to help smokers quit, probably by lowering generalized anxiety, which is a powerful trigger for lighting up. As little as 5 to 10 minutes of meditation, practiced daily, reduces generalized anxiety after about 6 to 8 weeks. A micro-meditation method

called “mindful moments,” which involves 30 to 45 seconds of deep belly breathing, helps smokers stave off cravings as they occur.

4. There are Apps for everything, and smoking cessation is no exception. However, the National Institute of Health found that a texting program called **SmokeFreeTXT** helps some quitters stay motivated. Still, even in our digital age, it helps to write down motivational reminders on, of all things, post-it notes, placing them in locations you know you’ll look, such as the dashboard of your car, a corner of your computer screen, the bathroom mirror, etc. Some studies show self-generated motivational messages on post-it notes work better than e-reminders on devices.
5. Know your **purpose**. It’s not enough to get rid of something (tobacco use). One must gain something in the process, so be clear about what benefits you desire from smoking cessation, such as improved health, smelling better, less sickness, being there for your grandkids, money for other things, etc. You need something to strive for, not just something to fight against.
6. When it comes to smoking cessation, **e-cigarettes** are not as helpful as their purveyors claim. However, they do work for some folks, generally those who use only e-cigarettes, rather than folks who alternate between using them and regular ones. Researchers stress that e-cigarettes work best in combination with other efforts, such as exercise and meditation.

A common question is whether it helps to have **social support**. It depends. Sometimes, having the encouragement of friends and family can backfire because it feels like added pressure. What’s more, too much “attaboy” can create subconscious resistance (“Don’t tell me what to do”), undermining one’s own efforts. However, it can help to enlist the support of one confidant who keeps the peer pressure and expectations to a minimum, while also providing measured encouragement, particularly when one falls off the wagon.

Overall, the good news is that smoking cessation is achievable. Challenging? You bet. Insurmountable? No way.