Weight Gain and Quitting Smoking

Some people gain weight when quitting smoking. This can be a concern for many smokers. It is important to remember that not every smoker who quits will put on weight. However, the health benefits from quitting far outweigh the risk of putting on some extra kilos. This factsheet provides information on why weight gain might occur and strategies to help maintain a healthy weight.

What can cause weight gain when quitting smoking?

- **Changed metabolism** – the nicotine from cigarettes boosts metabolic rate and increases the number of kilojoules burned. After stopping smoking, metabolic rate returns to normal. Because fewer kilojoules are burned, a person might gain weight even if they are eating the same amount as before.
- **Habit** – smokers may miss the hand-to-mouth action. This is often replaced with eating snacks, causing food intake to increase.
- **Eating more food** – the nicotine from cigarettes acts as an appetite suppressant and can result in smokers skipping meals. Quitting smoking may lead to feeling hungrier more than usual and changed eating habits.
- **Comfort** – food is comforting if you are feeling down or anxious and might be used to relieve cravings.
- **Reward** – snacks are often used as a reward for making progress and achieving goals, leading to weight gain.
- **Food is more appealing** – after quitting smoking, food will start to taste and smell much better as these senses begin to improve.

What foods should I eat?

When making decisions about food, choose:

- Plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Cereals, breads, pasta and rice – wholegrain options when possible
- Lean cuts of meat, poultry and fish
- Dairy foods such as milk, yoghurt and cheese – fat reduced options when possible
- Look on the nutrition information panel on product labels for foods that have:
  - Less than 10g total fat per 100g
  - Less than 15g sugars per 100g
  - Less than 400mg salt (sodium) per 100g
- Foods high in fat, sugar, salt and/or alcohol should not be eaten every day and only in small amounts

Handy hints to avoid weight gain:

- **Swap your snacks** – if your usual snacks are high in fat or sugar, swap these for healthier options such as carrot and celery sticks, low-fat dip, a piece of fruit, or plain popcorn.
- **Be prepared** – plan ahead for cravings by having healthy snacks with you that are ready to go. Preparing and freezing meals in advance will also save you time and money.
• **Exercise** – adding or increasing the amount of activity in your normal routine means the less kilojoules you have to cut out of your diet to prevent weight gain. Start by walking around the block.

• **Keep busy** – keep your mouth and hands occupied by chewing on sugar free gum, fruit, carrot sticks or sipping on water.

• **Don’t crash diet** – although it might be tempting to skip meals or make radical changes to how you eat to avoid weight gain, this can increase cravings and withdrawal symptoms. Having regular healthy meals throughout the day, especially breakfast, is the better way to prevent weight gain.

• **Be patient** – be aware that it takes about 20 minutes for your body to recognise that you are full, so wait a while after a meal or snack before eating more.

• **Drink water** – carry water with you to drink instead of having soft drinks or snacks.

• **Keep your mouth fresh** – brushing your teeth or eating a hot mint after a meal freshens your mouth and can stop you from eating more.

• **Experience** – make sure that you experience the food you are eating. Think about the taste, texture and enjoyment of the food. Try not to eat just for something to do.

• **Be realistic** – it is okay to gain some weight so don’t be discouraged. Weight loss and quitting smoking both take willpower and commitment. If it is difficult to manage both goals at the same time, focus on quitting smoking first. There will be plenty of time to achieve a healthy weight later.

A few extra kilos gained when quitting smoking is much less harmful to your health than continuing to smoke. Remember the goal of quitting and the benefits that you will gain.

After quitting smoking:

• Within 6 hours – your heart rate slows and blood pressure decreases.

• Within a day – carbon monoxide levels in your blood decrease and oxygen can more easily reach your heart and muscles. Your fingertips become warmer and your hands steadier.

• Within a week – your sense of taste and smell improve. Your lungs start to remove mucus, tar and dust.

• Within 2 months – you cough and wheeze less. Your immune system improves. Your blood become less thick and can flow better.

• Within 6 months – your lungs are working much better and produce less phlegm. You are less likely to feel stressed than when you were smoking.

*For more information visit:*

- http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/QuitSmoking/Urges/How-Can-I-Avoid-Weight-Gain-When-I-Stop-Smoking_UCM_307852_Article.jsp