Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

The Benefits of Quitting Tobacco

You're already aware of the negative consequences of smoking, but do you know how many benefits you can gain from quitting? You might be surprised! First and foremost, the decision to quit smoking can truly be a life-saving one. Just as continuing to smoke sets you up to experience life-threatening health problems, quitting can reverse the process, making you healthier today and more likely to avoid serious health problems in the future. Quitting can also improve your social interactions and can put money in your pocket. This section outlines some of the reasons that may help you to decide that the benefits of quitting are greater than the benefits of continuing to use tobacco.

Health and Vitality Benefits

Because many of the health risks associated with smoking can lead to death, the most important benefit of smoking cessation is the ability to choose life over death. Regardless of the actual symptoms individual smoker's experience, it is estimated that the average male smoker loses about 13 years of life and the average female smoker loses about 14 years of life. Also, because the effects of quitting start on the very day you stop smoking, former smokers live longer than people who continue to smoke.

Smoking cessation has immediate and long-term consequences for a smoker's health. The American Cancer Society reports the following benefits of smoking cessation, based on Surgeon Generals' Reports in 1988 and 1990:

- 20 minutes after quitting blood pressure drops to a level close to that before the last cigarette. Temperature of hands and feet return to normal.
- 8 hours after quitting the level of carbon monoxide in the blood returns to normal.
- 24 hours after quitting the risk of a heart attack decreases.
- 2 weeks to 3 months after quitting circulation improves and lung function increases up to 30%.
- 1 to 9 months after quitting symptoms such as coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue, and shortness of breath decrease. Cilia (tiny hair-like structures in the lungs that remove mucus from the lungs) regain normal function, which increases the ability for them to clean the lungs and reduce infection.
- 1 year after quitting the extra risk of coronary heart disease is reduced to half that of a smoker.
- 5 to 15 years after quitting smoking stroke risk is reduced to the level of a nonsmoker.
- 10 years after quitting the death rate from lung cancer is about half that of someone who continues to smoke. Risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas decreases.
- 15 years after quitting risk of coronary heart disease is the same as a nonsmoker.

Quitting smoking also reduces the effects of tobacco on your physical appearance and improves social interaction with nonsmokers by:

- Reducing premature wrinkling of the skin
- Eliminating bad breath associated with smoking
- Eliminating a major cause for stained teeth
- Reducing the risk of gum disease
- Eliminating the smoke smell from your clothing and hair
- Eliminating a cause of yellow fingernails.

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Smoking also has many effects on your body that have become a part of your life so gradually that you might not even be aware of them. Once you quit smoking you will notice that:

- Food tastes better
- Your sense of smell will return to normal
- It will take more activity for you to be out of breath
- You will feel more energetic and your stamina for physical activity will increase
- Exercise will become more enjoyable
- Breaks at work will no longer have to revolve around smoking
- You will no longer have to go outside in inclement weather to smoke
- You, your clothes, your car, and your house will no longer smell like smoke
- Falling ashes will no longer damage your clothes
- If you are single, you will have a larger group of people to date and possibly establish a long term relationship with
- You will no longer be burdened by social stigmas associated with being a smoker

You probably haven't even considered some of these benefits, but knowing how quitting can improve your life can provide you with increased motivation to kick the habit.

Saving Money

If health improvements and more social freedom don't motivate you to quit, consider the financial rewards. To find out how much money you can save by quitting smoking, take the cost per day for your smoking materials and multiply it by 365 days. Surprised? Now multiply that amount by 10 so you can see how much you could save in the next 10 years.

Chances are you've never considered how much money you could save by quitting because smoking is a normal part of your everyday life. Right now you are accustomed to living without the money you spend on tobacco products and supplies. When you quit, it should be simple to switch from paying for your habit to putting money in the bank, where you can watch it accumulate instead.