

Smoking and Bladder Cancer

Learn about the risks of smoking and bladder cancer and take charge of your health.



Many people do not realize that tobacco is the single most important known risk factor for bladder cancer. Smoking is estimated to contribute to 50% of bladder tumors. Current smokers are at higher risk than former smokers. Second-hand smoke can also increase the risk for the development of bladder cancer. While many people think “vaping” is safer than smoking, recent research suggests that both e-cigarettes and traditional cigarettes contribute to an increased risk for bladder cancer.

More than 7,000 different chemicals are in tobacco and tobacco smoke -- more than 70 of them are known to cause cancer. These chemicals cause damage in the most basic level of our bodies, the cells, and genes. The genetic damage caused by smoking can lead to uncontrolled cell growth which contributes to the formation of tumors. These tumors can grow and spread throughout the body.

The chemicals in tobacco smoke or through vaping get absorbed into the blood, pass through the kidneys and collect in the urine. Urine is in contact with the bladder for many hours at a time. This exposes your bladder to very high concentrations of these chemicals. They can damage the inside of the bladder and increase your chances of getting bladder cancer.

Studies have shown a strong association with increased risk of recurrence and disease progression with continued smoking after diagnosis and treatment of bladder cancer.

- Even a small reduction in the number of cigarettes or vapes a patient inhales may potentially allow them to live longer after their bladder cancer diagnosis.

Urologic oncologists, the doctors that treat bladder cancer, recommend that patients quit smoking to help avoid recurrence of their disease. In fact, the treatment guidelines from the American Urological Association remind doctors to encourage bladder cancer patients to adopt healthy lifestyle habits, including smoking cessation, exercise, and a healthy diet, to improve long-term health and quality of life.

To have the best chance of quitting tobacco, it helps to know what you are up against, what your options are, and where to go for help. It is hard to quit smoking, but *you can do it.*

Why quit?

After they quit, most former smokers often notice their breathing and circulation improves, along with their sense of smell and taste. They reduce the risk of a heart attack and of dying from lung cancer. After ten years, many former smokers' risk of bladder cancer decreases by half. Quitting now also may reduce your risk of your bladder cancer coming back.



- Patients smoking 1-2 packs or more per day are significantly more likely to have a higher risk of death compared to those who smoke less than one pack per day.

It may take several attempts before a smoker can quit forever.



Some smokers benefit from medications to help them quit. The US Food and Drug Administration has approved seven prescription medications to help people quit smoking. There are also over-the-counter medications and patches that reduce your craving for nicotine, a main substance found in smoke. Choosing which one to use is often a personal choice. Ask your pharmacist or health care provider for recommendations.

Counseling combined with medication makes it even more likely than using medication alone that you can quit smoking and stay away from tobacco for good.



Help can be as close as your smartphone. Quit smoking apps are available, but it is important to choose a program that is based on quit smoking recommendations proven through research to be effective.



Commit to quit: Set a date.

Think about the health benefits of quitting after your bladder cancer diagnosis such as:

- Improved sense of taste and smell and the gradual disappearance of that smoker's cough
- Healthier lungs, heart and blood vessels
- Lower risk of recurrence of bladder and other cancers

And there are also social benefits. Your friends and family do not get exposed to your secondhand smoke. You gain more control of your life and health. You set a better example for your kids and grandkids. You can save more than \$2,000 per year (the estimated cost of smoking one pack per day). Make a list of your reasons for quitting. Carry the list with you and review it often.

No one approach to quitting works for everyone. The key is, to be honest about your needs. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist to learn more about your options.

Quit Smoking Resources

- www.cvs.com/quit-smoking
- www.smokefree.gov
- www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quit-smoking.html
- <http://www.lung.org/stop-smoking/i-want-to-quit>

After you quit, appreciate your accomplishment! This is a major step in choosing a healthier lifestyle. Many people have relapses before they are successful in staying tobacco-free. Most slips and relapses occur within the first few weeks when withdrawal symptoms are strong, and your body still needs the nicotine. It is important to reaffirm your commitment to stop. Recognize that you have had a slip. One slip does not mean you have failed forever. It took time to become a regular tobacco user, and it will take some practice to become a comfortable nontobacco-user.



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