



Put It Out: Smoking Cessation Resources for Fire/EMS

Firefighters and emergency personnel are known for running into extremely difficult situations when everyone else is running out. You can face the difficult process of quitting smoking. A smoke free lifestyle will improve your health and lessen your risks of many serious diseases, including heart disease, lung cancer, and emphysema. Cigarette smoking is the most preventable cause of death in the U.S. Quit today for yourself and for all those who depend on you – your family, your department, and your community.

The NVFC has compiled a series of resources to help first responders quit smoking and stay quit. Families, departments, and state associations can also use these resources to inform and help first responders take the first step towards a smoke-free life and support them as they maintain their healthier lifestyle.

Benefits of Quitting Smoking

Smoking increases the mortality rates for a variety of diseases, including lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema, bronchitis, and chronic airways obstruction. Simply stated, there is no safe way to smoke. Although low-tar and low-nicotine cigarettes may reduce the risk for lung cancer somewhat, they do not lessen the risk for cardiovascular heart disease (CHD). In fact, smoking accelerates atherosclerosis – the depositing of plaques containing cholesterol and lipids on the inner walls of arteries. It also increases the risk for stroke.

The risk for CHD increases along with the number of cigarettes smoked daily. Quitting smoking sharply lowers the risk, even in the first year and no matter what a person's age. Quitting also reduces the risk for a second heart attack in those who have already experienced one. No matter how long you have smoked, quitting has immediate benefits. Within minutes after you smoke that last cigarette, your body begins a series of changes that continue for years.

Timeline for Benefits of Quitting

- 20 minutes after quitting, your heart rate drops.
- 12 hours after quitting, carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- Two weeks to three months after quitting, your heart attack risk begins to drop, and your lung function begins to improve.
- One to nine months after quitting, your coughing and shortness of breath decrease.
- One year after quitting, your added risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a continuing smoker's risk.
- Five to 15 years after quitting, your stroke risk is reduced to that of a non-smoker's.
- 10 years after quitting, your lung cancer death rate is about half that of a smoker's. Your risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas decreases.

- 15 years after quitting, your risk of coronary heart disease is now the same as that of a non-smoker's risk.

Additional Benefits

Quitting smoking has long-lasting benefits for you, your family, and those around you, including:

- You will live longer and live better.
- You will lower your chance of having a heart attack, stroke, or cancer.
- If you are pregnant, quitting smoking will improve your chances of having a healthy baby.
- The people you live with, especially your children, will be healthier.
- You will have extra money to spend on things that are truly good for you.

Special Conditions

While the benefits of quitting smoking affect everyone, your own personal situation or condition may give you even more special reasons to quit:

- Pregnant women and new mothers: By quitting, you will protect your baby's health as well as your own.
- Hospitalized patients: By quitting, you reduce health problems and accelerate your healing.
- Heart attack patients: By quitting, you reduce your risk of a second heart attack.
- Lung, head, and neck cancer patients: By quitting, you reduce your chance of a second cancer developing.
- Parents: By quitting, you protect your children from illnesses caused by second-hand smoke and set a good example.

Five Steps for Quitting Smoking

If you have ever tried to quit smoking, you know what a challenge it can be. It is hard because nicotine is a very addictive drug. Quitting is so difficult that people often try two or three times before finally being able to quit. But the benefits are well worth the effort, and it is one of the most important things you can ever do for yourself and your loved ones. The following five steps will help you quit – and quit for good. You will have the best chance of quitting if you use them together.

Step 1: Get Ready

- Set a quit date.
- Change your environment.
- Review your past attempts to quit.
- Once you quit, do not smoke a puff.

Step 2: Get Support and Encouragement

- Talk to your healthcare provider.
- Get individual, group, or telephone counseling support. The more support you have, the better your chances are of quitting.
- Ask family and friends to not smoke around you.

Step 3: Learn New Skills and Behaviors

- Drink plenty of water and other fluids.
- Distract yourself from urges to smoke.
- Do things that reduce your stress.
- Plan something fun to do every day.

Step 4: Get Medication and Use It Correctly

Medications can help you stop smoking and lessen the urge to smoke. However, if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant, nursing, under age 18, currently smoking fewer than 10 cigarettes per day, or have a medical condition, be sure to talk to your doctor or other healthcare provider before taking medications.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved six medications to help you quit smoking:

- Bupropion SR – prescription only
- Nicotine gum – available over the counter
- Nicotine inhaler – prescription only
- Nicotine nasal spray – prescription only
- Nicotine patch – available by prescription and over the counter
- Varenicline Tartrate – prescription only

Ask your healthcare provider for advice, and carefully read the information on medication packages.

Step 5: Be Prepared for Relapse or Difficult Situations

Most relapses occur within the first three months after quitting. Do not be discouraged if you start smoking again. Remember that most people try several times before they finally quit.

Here are some difficult situations to watch for:

- Avoid drinking alcohol.
- Being around a smoking environment or other smokers can make you want to smoke.
- Many smokers will gain weight when they quit – usually less than 10 pounds. Eat a healthy diet and stay active. Some quit-smoking medications may help delay weight gain.
- If you experience moodiness or depression, there are ways to improve your mood other than resuming smoking.

If you are having problems with any of these situations, be sure to talk to your doctor or other healthcare provider.

Quit Tips

For Smokers:

- Remember that you are **not** alone. About 15 percent of American adults are former smokers. Find a support group or mentor to help you through the process.
- Nibble on low calorie snacks like fruits and veggies.
- Chew gum when smoking cravings hit.
- Remove unnecessary reminders, such as ashtrays and lighters, from your house, car, and office.
- Write a list of reasons why you want to quit smoking so that you can remind yourself of why you are going through this process.
- Find a type of exercise that you enjoy and steadily work it into your routine.
- Keep a log of when you most often crave a cigarette so that you can plan a strategy to avoid the triggers. For example:
 - Carry a book, magazine, or crossword puzzle with you to help you endure breaks, waiting for a bus, or other moments when you may be bored and would normally smoke.
 - After dinner, suck on a hard candy, sip your favorite beverage, or use a toothpick to substitute the cigarette.
- Stock your car with simple snacks such as sunflower seeds.
- Visit Smokefree.gov to see how extra much money you will have available in the coming days, months, and years, just by quitting smoking.
- Do not be discouraged if you give in. Most ex-smokers tried to quit several times before they succeeded. Wipe your slate clean and try again!

For Supporting Someone Trying to Quit:

- If you are a smoker, do not smoke around those who you know are trying to quit.
- Remain optimistic and offer words of encouragement, especially if the person is struggling or has faced a setback.
- Expect the person to be irritable, especially in the beginning.
- Refrain from taking the person to restaurants, bars, or other places that you know allow smoking, and try out smoke-free establishments instead.
- Plan activities to do with the person to help keep them active and their minds off smoking.
- Celebrate with them at various milestones.
- Ask them what you can do to show support and make the process easier for them.

Utilizing Healthcare Services

There are many healthcare services that may be available to help you in the smoking cessation process.

Insurance Coverage

One of the first steps you should take when considering various healthcare services to help you quit smoking is to talk with your insurance company. Depending on your plan, your insurance company may cover some or all types of treatments. Knowing your options will only benefit you if you decide to talk over treatment options with your doctor.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health provides this list of questions to ask your insurance company:

- Are medications covered in my plan? If so:
 - Are prescription medications covered?
 - Are over-the-counter medications covered?
 - Is there a limit to the amount of medication that is covered?
 - What is the co-pay?
- Is counseling (support) to quit smoking covered in my plan? If so,
 - Is one-on-one counseling covered?
 - Is group counseling covered?
 - Are local quit-smoking services available?
 - Is there a limit to the amount of counseling that is covered?
 - Is there a co-pay or reimbursement for services?
- Are other types of support covered, such as acupuncture?

Screenings

Because smoking is a catalyst for many types of illness, regular health screenings are important in determining the status of your health. You may have a risk factor or illness without knowing it, and routine recommended health screenings can provide the early detection that can save your life. You should discuss your health screening schedule with your doctor, but also consider utilizing free screenings when possible.

Talking to your Doctor

After you have consulted your insurance company and know what treatment options, if any, are covered, you should talk to your doctor. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has a [list of questions](#) to ask your healthcare provider to help get the best personalized care for you.

Individual Counseling and Support Groups

Quitting smoking is difficult, but having support can make it easier. According to the United States Public Health Association guidelines, your chances of quitting increase every time you engage in a counseling session that involves interpersonal contact. One-on-one counseling sessions are ideal but can be expensive. If your insurance will not cover such a session and you cannot afford it, try to find a support group instead. Some support groups charge small fees to join the program, but many are free. Here are some ideas of places to look for support groups:

- Hospitals

- Churches
- Universities
- Health Department
- Smokefree.gov
- [American Lung Association](http://AmericanLungAssociation.org)

Be wary of any counseling that promises instant results with no effort, charges expensive fees to participate, or will not provide references of people who have been through the program.

When considering a program or class, consider asking the following questions:

- Is the program convenient? Ask about where it is conducted, how long sessions last, and what time of the day they are held. If it is inconvenient for you, you might make excuses not to go.
- Is the staff well-trained and professional? Ask who will be leading the group. If the program involves hypnosis, the practitioner should have a license or be certified in psychiatry, psychology, or social work.
- Does the program provide what you need? Find out whether the group emphasizes lectures or group discussions.
- What is the success rate? A good program follows up on participants for at least three months. Do not be surprised if the success rate sounds low. In many programs, only one out of four or five people stays off cigarettes afterwards for at least a year.
- How much will it cost? Price is not necessarily the best gauge of how good a program is. Many of the most successful programs are free to participants.

Department Smoking Ban

Many cities, states, and even some countries have adopted policies to provide a smoke-free environment for their citizens. Most people are aware of the health risks to smokers, but sometimes the fact that even non-smokers are at risk due to second-hand smoke goes unnoticed. Smoking bans seek to ensure that everyone can breathe smoke-free air. In fact, studies have shown that the ban on smoking in public places to curb secondhand smoke has resulted in a drop in heart attacks.

If your department is considering adopting a smoking cessation program, there are multiple approaches available, but the process does not happen overnight. Below are some ideas to make the transition smoother. Please keep in mind that every department and community is different, so what works for one organization does not always work for another. Talk with your neighboring departments to find out if they would be willing to adopt a similar smoke-free campaign. Being able to partner with another department in launching a smoking ban provides more support and continuity community-wide.

Step 1: Make a Plan

Before you can implement a smoking ban, you must devise a clear picture of what the new policy should accomplish and what steps you will take to ensure success. To make the process easier, think of context-awareness: who, what, when, where, why, and how. *Who* will the policy effect? *What* items specifically will the policy address? *When* will the policy take effect? *Where* will the policy be communicated? *Why* is the policy being implemented? *How* will the policy be enforced?

Here are some more specific questions to consider:

- Is the goal to make the department a smoke-free zone or is the goal to have your entire department become non-smokers, even on their own time?
- If your goal is to increase overall health of your firefighters, is smoking the only topic that you will address? (You may also want to consider educating members on the health risks of over-consumption of alcohol, obesity, and chewing tobacco, for example.)
- Will you have an established smoking area or will smoking be prohibited on the entire premises?
- Will visitors be expected to abide by the same rules? (Some departments host bingo night fundraisers when smoking is allowed for community members.)
- What kind of assistance can your department provide for smokers to help them quit?

Once you know what you want your smoking ban to accomplish and how you will enforce the new policy, it is time to get started.

[Click here](#) to download a sample No Smoking Policy to help you in developing your own department's policy.

Step 2: Education

If your smoking ban is to be successful, your members need to understand why this change is taking place. Many resources are available to help you educate your members on the dangers of smoking, not only for the smokers themselves, but also for those around them.

Consider hosting a class about the dangers of smoking or work it into department meetings. Never point fingers, but remind members that smoking always has an effect. For people with asthma or for people who are allergic to cigarette smoke, even being in the vicinity of a lit cigarette can have major health ramifications. Often, highlighting the benefits of a smoke-free environment is enough to gather more than sufficient support from the members of your department.

If you have anyone on the department who is an ex-smoker, find out if they would be willing to take on some responsibility for the campaign. Maybe he or she could speak about his or her experience with quitting, act as an advocate for the new policy, or simply serve as a mentor to those who may decide to try to quit. The current smokers on your department may be significantly more receptive to listening to someone that has been in their shoes than someone who has never smoked.

Step 3: Communication

In addition to education, you will need to communicate with your department about the policy. Choose a date that the policy will take effect and advertise it, along with the details of the policy and why the department feels that smoking cessation is important. Ways to communicate internally include email, letters, flyers, announcements during meetings, and word of mouth. Externally, you can send press releases to your local newspapers regarding your department's health initiatives, post an article on your department web site, or advertise the starting date of the ban on your marquee.

Step 4: Participation

Participation is crucial to the success of your smoking ban. Whenever possible, try to make participation easier. Here are some ideas to encourage participation in your department:

- Offer nicotine gum or patches at no cost when members are at the department.
- Find out if a counselor in your community would be willing to donate time to work with department members who are struggling with quitting.
- Celebrate milestones when members quit for a week, month, etc.
- Highlight members' achievements by posting their success story on your department's web site.

Additional Resources

[Get Help, Quit Smoking](#)

Smoking Cessation Trust

[Heart-Healthy Firefighter Resource Guide](#)

National Volunteer Fire Council

[Quit Smoking](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Tobacco and Smoking Cessation](#)

National Cancer Institute

[Vaping/Quit Smoking/Tobacco](#)

American Heart Association

[Plan My Quit](#)

Lung Disease Information

- [American Lung Association](#)
- [International COPD](#)
- [Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation](#)

Research and Articles

Secondhand Smoke Exposure and Cardiovascular Effects

Making Sense of the Evidence

Data and Statistics

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Sources: American Cancer Society, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, National Institutes of Health, and Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Tobacco Use