

Reduce Smoking and Improve Pain Management

Why Can Smoking Increase Your Pain?

Smoking is addictive. The nicotine in tobacco can trick your body by triggering feel good chemicals that give off a “reward” sensation.



However, tobacco products can also limit blood flow of oxygen to bones and tissues.

Less blood and nutrient flow cause damage, specifically in the spine, which can cause lower back pain.

Research shows a connection between smoking and feeling tired and slower healing. This may make painful symptoms more noticeable.

The Vicious Cycle

Unfortunately, smoking to manage pain is a vicious cycle. Some people believe smoking helps them deal with chronic pain. When they feel the pain coming on, they reach for a cigarette. This is harmful - because if you smoke, you may not respond to pain management or therapies as well.



There are chemicals in cigarettes that may temporarily relieve your pain. However, when you are done smoking, the pain is still there and you begin to feel withdrawal from nicotine, which can make the pain worse.

How Does Smoking Affect Pain in Your Body?

If you live with chronic pain, you are not alone. Almost 100 million Americans live with this condition.

People with chronic pain smoke about two times more than the general population.



Smoking can cause or worsen chronic pain conditions and interferes with pain medication.

Smoking can cause you to be more sensitive to pain. Smokers may need a higher dose of pain medications to reduce or manage pain, which can lead to additional health concerns.



Some people smoke to try to control or distract themselves from their pain, especially during stressful times, making it harder to cope with chronic pain.

Smoking can cause and make certain conditions more painful, including back pain, headaches, rheumatoid arthritis, tooth and gum pain and fibromyalgia. Pain also reduces your body’s ability to heal by itself.

Also, if you have been diagnosed with cancer and continue to smoke, you are likely to experience more pain than people with cancer who have never smoked or who have quit smoking.

Ways to Reduce or Stop Smoking to Improve Pain

Personal Changes:

- Drink lots of water
- Use gum or mints when a craving kicks-in
- Get your teeth cleaned and/or whitened
- Avoid caffeinated beverages (coffee, soda) and alcohol
- Wash your clothes and clean your car to get rid of the smell of cigarettes
- Stay away from places where you would normally smoke (bars, nightclubs and outdoor areas of restaurants that allow smoking)
- Become physically active; exercise - walk or bike



Contact a Quitline – see bottom of document

Social Support

- Surround yourself with people you trust
- Focus on people who can help
- Ask for help
- Be specific about your wants
- Grow your social circle



I Want to Quit Using Tobacco – How Do I Get Started?

South Dakota Quitline: [QUIT SD | https://quittobaccosd.com/](https://quittobaccosd.com/)
North Dakota Quitline: [ND Quits | https://ndquits.health.nd.gov/](https://ndquits.health.nd.gov/)

Content adapted from:

PAMI ED – Discharge Planning Toolkit for Pain
Cleveland Clinic: Smokers who struggle with chronic pain
Healthgrades: The link between smoking and chronic pain
Everydayhealth: Chronic pain and smoking
Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Smoking & Tobacco Use