

## Health & Fitness Tips

### Smoking - How to run out of puff

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Tobacco smoking is the largest single preventable cause of death and disease in Australia today.

Since the introduction of anti-smoking media campaigns, government-sponsored anti-smoking literature and laws governing the sale and advertising of tobacco products, Australia has experienced the largest fall in tobacco use of any country in the world.

It is now estimated that, based on present trends, less than 5 per cent of Australians will smoke in 20 years from now.

Further improvements in smoking cessation rates might occur as smoking becomes less tolerated and less normalised, resulting in smokers becoming social outcasts with clear pressure upon them to quit.



#### Why do people take up smoking?

Most people start smoking before the age of 18. Research has shown that young people smoke to look mature, to be like their friends, to rebel and experiment, and to help them relax. Some start because it gives them something to do and others, especially girls, start smoking because they think it may help keep their weight down.

Adults tend to take up smoking to deal with stress, depression or anxiety and to feel relaxed.

#### Why don't people just stop smoking?

Many people are under the assumption that smoking is just like any other so-called habit and is easy to stop. Not so.

The addictive properties of nicotine makes this assumption unrealistic. Nicotine affects many different regions throughout the brain by:

- increasing the release of substances that improve reaction time, concentration and attention, making the smoker feel more competent;
- stimulating the reward pathways of the brain, thus reinforcing the behaviour;
- stimulating areas of the brain that bring on pleasant, happy feelings that reinforce the desire to smoke again; and
- promoting the release of neurotransmitters involved in learning and memory.

It is for these reasons that smokers continue to smoke or have such difficulty in quitting, despite the preponderance of evidence on the harmful effects.

Further difficulties arise because of nicotine withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, depression and craving. Over a period of about a month, these symptoms and the physiological changes subside, but for many smokers, even a day without nicotine is excruciating.

#### Who can help you to stop smoking?

Every year, millions of people try to break the nicotine habit. However, most people try to do so without help. They throw in the towel after less than a week because of the manner in which nicotine affects the brain, making the desire for nicotine irresistible.

To succeed in quitting, the smoker should seek professional help. Quitline is a federal, state and territory anti-smoking health initiative that has a raft of information on smoking cessation, and offers a multitude of free resources to assist those wishing to quit smoking. Quitline can be contacted on 131848 and information on smoking cessation is available at [www.quitnow.info.au](http://www.quitnow.info.au)

Further support is provided to ADF members through counselling from medical officers, psychologists and smoking-cessation counsellors. The use of nicotine-replacement therapy – including nicotine gum, patches and lozenges – also enhances a smoker's ability to quit and can be prescribed to ADF members.

It is helpful to remember that smoking relapses are common. If you do happen to relapse, do not give up trying to quit this harmful addiction.