

Smoking increases anxiety and tension

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You have heard how quitting smoking can improve your physical health, but you may continue because you believe smoking reduces your stress and anxiety. It is not necessarily true.



What happens to your brain when you smoke?

When you smoke, nicotine enters your brain within 10 seconds. It mimics dopamine (the happy hormone) which your brain recognises as a feeling of relaxation and calmness. Because your brain has become addicted to the stimulation, withdrawal symptoms increase the need for another cigarette. This cycle decreases your brains' natural production of dopamine.

Effects of smoking on your mental health

You may smoke because you think it keeps you calm. However, it increases the level of stress in your body and has the following adverse reactions:

- Increased blood pressure and heart rate.
- Tenses your muscles.
- Constricts your blood vessels.
- Decreases oxygen flow to the brain and body.

According to Dr Desere Ferreira, good mental health is not simply the absence of diagnosable mental health problems. Mental health is about being cognitively, emotionally, and socially healthy. It affects the way we think, feel, act and develop relationships. Download the *Mental Health Matters* ebook by Dr Ferreira.

Can quitting smoking reverse these effects on the brain?

Once you quit smoking, the withdrawal symptoms may leave you reaching for another cigarette, but here's what you should know. Once you've stopped, the nicotine receptors in your brain will gradually return to normal, and, in time, the craving response will subside.

Quitting tobacco can benefit your body in many ways, such as:

- Slowing your heart rate just 20 minutes after your last cigarette.
- Reducing the levels of carbon monoxide in your blood to a normal range within 12 hours.
- Improving your circulation and lung function within three months.
- Cutting your risk of a heart attack by 50 percent within a year.
- Reducing the risk of a stroke to that of a non-smoker within 5 to 15 years.
- Decreasing anxiety, depression, and stress levels.

Quitting smoking does not deal with the root problem. Talk to a doctor for guidance in dealing with underlying challenges that may lead to higher stress levels or increased anxiety.

Help to quit smoking

Quitting smoking may be easier said than done, but with the right help, you can have a nicotine-free life.

- Quitting smoking may produce withdrawal and other symptoms. Talk to your doctor about an effective treatment plan.
- Consider over-the-counter nicotine replacement products such as gum, patches, and lozenges. If you need more help, your doctor can write a prescription for medication that helps block the effect of nicotine in the brain.
- Get mental health support. Intercare healthcare professionals may help treat underlying stress, anxiety, or depression. They can also refer to a vast network of mental health specialists.
- Implement lifestyle changes. Exercise, quality sleep, and a healthy diet also contribute to dopamine production and help you keep on track with your quit-smoking goals.

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