

- Smoking

Small steps to kick the habit

Try these strategies if you want to stop smoking in a sustainable way.

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THERE are so many good reasons to stop smoking. You'll save money, won't be out of breath when you go upstairs and set a good example for your children, to name just a few.

If you have a particular reason to stop smoking, whatever it is, that will help you to see it through, experts say, as you will be more motivated.

Keep those personal reasons for quitting smoking front of mind, preferably by writing them down, is the advice of Germany's Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA).

But even the strongest reasons cannot protect you from the fact that quitting smoking can be a challenge.

Here are some of the typical pitfalls – and how to handle them:

What do I do if I really want a cigarette now?

Stay strong, using one of the following strategies:

- ◆ **Postpone:** Even if you may not feel that way, craving a cigarette is a feeling that usually subsides, often in just 30 seconds to three minutes. So one tactic is to let time pass, say by taking 10 deep breaths.
- ◆ **Dodge any offers:** When your former smoking buddy offers you a cigarette, that can upset the best-laid plans to quit. Ideally, try to avoid situations like this in advance, says the BZgA. If you still want to spend time with people during smoking breaks, try being open about your intention to quit and ask your friends not to offer you a cigarette.
- ◆ **Get away:** If you find it is almost unbearable to be around smokers, then try stepping away for a moment.
- ◆ **Distract yourself:** Small, pleasant activities can distract you from the desire for a cigarette. That could mean writing a message to a dear friend or taking a quick shower, say health experts. Having chewing gum or a healthy snack like nuts on hand will also keep your mouth busy as a distraction.

What do I do if I cave?

Psychotherapist Mykola Fink from Germany's Schön Bad Bramstedt clinic tells people to avoid making the aim to "stop smoking." The trouble is that that leads to an all-or-nothing mentality, which means denying your previous successes, say if you managed to stop for two weeks, for example.

The better approach is a second attempt, she says. That allows you to learn from failure, though you will need to analyse the situation honestly.

That can mean looking at what made you weak and developing strategies to avoid this in the future.

What do I do if quitting smoking on my own is too much for me?

Try a stop smoking service, for example via your local health service or online.

Test-winning apps rely on cognitive behavioural therapy methods, meaning they help you to assess your habits and replace them with new ones.

Depending on where you live, your health insurance might reimburse the costs for stop-smoking apps and programmes.

You may also find support available from health counselling hotlines as many governments are looking to support citizens in stopping smoking. – dpa