



Limiting Weight Gain While You Quit Smoking

Congestive Heart Failure Education Series

People are likely to gain weight when they quit smoking. Some people think this is a reason to continue smoking. However, there are ways to avoid gaining a large amount of weight while giving up smoking forever.

Here are the facts:

- Research shows that smokers gain weight when they quit, even if they don't eat more.¹
- Most smokers gain less than 10 pounds when quitting.²
- The amount of weight you gain is a minor health risk compared to the risks of continuing to smoke.²
- Using nicotine gum may delay weight gain, but it doesn't prevent it. Studies show that once people quit using the gum, they gain about the same amount of weight as people who never used it.³

So why should I quit?

Compare the importance of quitting smoking to the few extra pounds that you may gain when you quit. Try to recall your reasons for quitting and the benefits you desired, such as less coughing, fewer wrinkles, and saving money. Keep these benefits in mind while you are quitting. Once you feel you have truly conquered your smoking habit, you can work on losing weight.

What should I watch out for?

It is important that you accept the fact that people almost always gain weight when they quit smoking. If you gain five pounds, or even more, don't panic and pick up a cigarette. Think about what may be causing the weight gain and whether you can change it: Are you eating too often? Are you eating the wrong foods? Do you need more exercise?

What can I do to limit weight gain?

It is possible to limit how much weight you gain. These tips may help you:

- Increase your level of physical activity. Walking for just 10 minutes, three times a day may help prevent a large weight gain. It may also help you cope with your urges to smoke. Before beginning any exercise program, check with your doctor.
 - Keep busy. Start new hobbies or activities, especially ones using your hands, such as knitting, writing letters, and doing crossword puzzles.
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- Avoid drinking too much alcohol, since alcoholic drinks are high in calories. A simple glass of wine adds about 100 calories, while a cocktail contains about 150–200 calories.
 - Keep a supply of low-calorie foods to munch on. (See list in box.) This is a good time to start eating more healthful foods such as fruits and vegetables, and fewer high-calorie “junk” foods.
 - When you find yourself reaching for something to eat, grab a glass of water, diet soda, or iced tea instead. Sip these drinks throughout the day.

If you are still concerned about gaining weight, call your doctor or discuss it with another health care professional. Together you may be better able to work out a plan that will help you limit weight gain without going back to smoking.

Low-Calorie Munchies

Choose three or four items and stock up:

- Popcorn without butter or salt
 - Sugarless gum or candy
 - Breadsticks
 - Vegetable sticks (carrots, celery, etc.)
 - Gingersnaps
 - Hard candies
 - Pretzels (salt-free)
 - Licorice
 - Fruit
 - Graham crackers
 - Jelly beans, gum drops
 - Rice cakes
 - Popsicles
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References:

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3. Gross J, Stitzer ML, Maldonado J. Nicotine replacement: effects on postcessation weight gain. *Journal of Consult Clinical Psychology*. 1989;57:87-92.

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