

LUNG HEALTH & SMOKING



How is lung health impacted by smoking?

Smoking harms your lungs, making it harder for them to work normally and making it more difficult for you to fight off respiratory illnesses.

- Even brief exposure to tobacco smoke reduces your body's ability to clear germs and debris from your lungs.
- Smoking causes your body to produce too much mucus, which blocks your airway and reduces your lung function.

What kinds of problems related to lung health can occur when I smoke?

Smoking weakens your immune system's ability to fight off illnesses while also increasing inflammation in your body. Inflammation can damage your tissues and organs over time, leading to long-term problems such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

When you smoke, you are more at risk for respiratory illnesses such as the common cold, flu, pneumonia, and tuberculosis. People who smoke get respiratory illnesses more frequently and are also more likely to need to be hospitalized if they become sick.

How does quitting smoking improve my lung health?

Although smoking harms your lung health, much of this damage can be stopped or even reversed after quitting.

When you stop smoking:

- You will breathe more easily, with less shortness of breath and coughing.
- You might notice that you cough more right after quitting—this is because debris and mucus are being cleared from your lungs, improving how well your lungs work.
- Your risk for lung cancer will continue to drop compared to what it would be if you continued to smoke.
- If you have COPD, you will slow or stop disease progression.

I want to stop smoking — how do I get started?

- Talk to your VA primary care or mental health provider about tobacco cessation medications and counseling that can help you quit
- Call VA's tobacco quitline: **1-855-QUIT-VET** (1-855-784-8838) Monday–Friday, available in English & Spanish
- Sign up for VA's SmokefreeVET text messaging program—text the word **VET** to **47848** (or **VETesp** to **47848** for Spanish) or visit smokefree.gov/VET
- Visit mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco



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Tobacco & Health: Policy and Programs