



LawCare Ltd.  
Health Support and Advice for Lawyers

# Stopping Smoking



## Helplines

Solicitors: 1800 991801

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[www.lawcare.ie](http://www.lawcare.ie)

## Introduction

In March 2004, Ireland became the first country in the world to ban smoking in public places. It was estimated that around 5% of smokers regularly flouted the law, but there has nevertheless been a considerable decrease in the number of smokers, and in tobacco related health problems. The HSE reported that following the ban there was a 17% drop in bar staff reporting coughs or other chest complaints. In 1998, 31% of the Irish population smoked, but less than a quarter of the population now smokes. Despite the revenue it receives - 84% of the price of a packet of cigarettes is tax – the Government want levels of smoking reduced, not least because 7,000 Irish people die each year due to the effects of smoking, and health care services to those who smoke cost the government €1 billion each year.

Whilst many lawyers are successful enough not to have to worry about the high cost of cigarettes, or high health insurance and life assurance premiums, smoking may not be part of the image they wish to convey to clients. Many people, particularly those with a higher disposable income, are embracing the health-conscious mood of the age, eating organic produce, going to the gym regularly and saving alcohol for special occasions. Regularly inhaling over 4,000 chemicals, over 60 of which are known to cause cancer, does not fit in with that wholesome lifestyle.

83% of smokers wish they had never started, and at any given time, almost a third are trying to give up. They face an uphill battle. Nicotine is as addictive as heroin or cocaine, it's available in every supermarket and corner newsagents, and studies have shown that most people become addicted to it when they are under 16. But it's not impossible to give up smoking – and it is well worth it.

“The worst thing about smoking is actually not the hacking coughs, the stinking clothes, the poisonous, filthy, acrid cloud that follows you everywhere, (which smokers never seem to notice), It's not even the cost. It's the slavery! Freedom from that slavery is going out for a walk or a drive without having to check that you have enough cigs in your pack, it's starting a trip without having to first hit the newsagent for your "drugs," it's getting on a plane for a 5 hour flight without feeling any discomfort, it's sitting through a 3 hour movie without starting to get antsy halfway through, it's not having to run outside in the snow or rain just to get your "fix." It's no longer being an abject slave to a little white tube of cancer and death!” *Don J.*

## Why do you smoke?

Most people start smoking in their teens due to peer pressure, or to try to make themselves look more grown up. As they grow older they stop thinking like that, but by then are too addicted to stop. They may then try to justify it to themselves in other ways.

- “I enjoy smoking”  
Most smokers find smoking pleasurable, especially the first drag which creates a “rush” and makes them feel calmer. In reality, this feeling is because the absence of nicotine in the body had led to unpleasant feelings associated with withdrawal which are then quelled with a cigarette. In reality the cigarette is not making the smoker calmer, but stopping them from feeling the stress of craving. Once they have given up smoking the craving and other withdrawal symptoms will abate and the former smoker will feel as good as they did when smoking a cigarette *all the time*.
- “It calms me down”  
As has already been shown, a cigarette only gives the impression of calming the smoker by removing the craving and other unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. In fact the pulse rate speeds up during smoking because the heart has to work harder to get oxygen from the lungs round the body. In addition, smokers working in environments where they can’t smoke – such as the average law firm – become excessively stressed because they are unable to deal with their cravings.
- “It helps control my weight and it’s important to me to look my best.”  
Smoking does indeed cause the body to waste some of the calories in food, and people who give up smoking can put on a couple of pounds partly due to this and partly because they want to eat more because food tastes better. Most former smokers soon lose the weight again, however.

And while smoking may appear to have a positive effect on weight, it has a negative effect on other areas of the body. Smokers age far faster than non-smokers, and may have up to ten times more wrinkles as smoking dries the skin. In addition smokers are likely to have yellowed teeth and possibly yellowed fingers – hardly attractive. Smelling good is also just as important as looking good, and any non-smoker knows that standing close to a heavy smoker is a most unpleasant experience.

- “I’m addicted and it’s too late to change now”  
Nicotine is a powerful addiction, and many smokers report that they hate the feeling of having lost the freedom to choose whether or not to smoke. But addictions can be broken and it is never too late to give up. The health benefits from stopping smoking begin almost immediately, and at any age.

## Preparing to Stop Smoking

The most obvious way to stop smoking is simply to put out the last cigarette and resolve never to have another; however, doing this without any preparation or support is unlikely to succeed and only one in thirty who quit “cold turkey” in this way are cigarette free a year later.

First, it’s important to be certain that you really want to stop, and are doing it for yourself and not for anyone else. Otherwise when the going gets tough – and it will – you will not have the reserves of strength and willpower sufficient to get through it.

Spend at least a week preparing to quit. You might consider doing the following:

- **Set a date on which you will become a non-smoker.**  
As you plan and work towards this date, think about why and when you smoke, and how you feel. Keeping a diary during this time can help identify patterns. It may help to cut down slowly during this time, with the aim to cut out the last few cigarettes on your chosen date.
- **List the reasons you want to give up.**  
Carry this list with you in the pocket or bag where you keep your cigarettes and look at it often.
- **If you plan to use them, make sure you have a good supply of nicotine replacement products such as gum or patches.**  
These have been shown to double your chance of success.
- **Think about triggers that make you want a cigarette.**  
Do you smoke more when you are drinking, or in a particular place, or with a particular person? Where possible, plan to avoid these trigger factors.
- **Enlist the support of family and friends, or perhaps a support helpline or group**  
Tell everyone that you will be stopping smoking, and ask others not to smoke around you. If possible, ask a family member or friend to quit with you for mutual support. A look through your local Yellow Pages, or web search, may reveal a support group in your area.
- **Plan alternative activities for times when you typically smoked.**  
It takes six minutes to smoke a cigarette, so a 20-a-day smoker will have an extra two hours each day to fill. Think about what you might do with your hands if you might have a problem not holding a cigarette. Read a book? Eat a healthy snack?
- **Clean cigarettes from your home and any other environment where you smoked.**  
Get rid of all the ashtrays and wash your clothes the day before you give up so that they do not smell of smoke.

## Becoming a Non Smoker

- **One day at a time**

Alcoholics Anonymous and similar programmes for those giving up addictive substances encourage members to think about abstaining for just “a day at a time”. In the early days, when the cravings are at their worst, this approach may be particularly helpful. Congratulate yourself on each day you are smoke-free. The health benefits begin after just one day, and every day without a cigarette is beneficial to your health, your bank balance and your family.
- **Beat early-days cravings**

Many former smokers report that the hardest part is the beginning, specifically the first five days or so. This is when you are abandoning old habits, and experiencing nicotine withdrawal symptoms. Cravings increase in intensity for three minutes and then subside, so while you’re waiting it out why not drink some water to help your body cleanse the nicotine from your system? Nicotine replacement therapy can reduce the cravings, but can’t get rid of them altogether.
- **Withdrawal symptoms**

You can expect to feel moody and irritable, have difficulty concentrating, feel restless and have sleep problems. These will pass within a few days. You may also get a chesty cough. This is your body finally getting the opportunity to rid itself of the rubbish in your lungs. Think about how you would deal with crises which would usually have you reaching for a “calming” cigarette – perhaps a hot bubble bath with some scented candles, or some relaxing music.
- **Helpful therapies**

Many people find therapies such as hypnosis, bioresonance or acupuncture helpful. If you think a particular approach may help you, or has helped you with something else in the past, then it is worth pursuing. Many independent counsellors also offer counselling to those who are attempting to break an addiction to nicotine. Be sure to check out the therapy in detail before committing to it, and don’t see it as a replacement for willpower.
- **Reward yourself and expect rewards**

It is important to remain positive and congratulate yourself on your achievement each day. Plan rewards for yourself. You could visit a smoke-free place – a museum, theatre or restaurant. You could also buy yourself a bunch of flowers and enjoy their scent – you should find your sense of smell returning after about a week. The sense of taste returns fully after about two weeks.
- **After-Dinner smoke**

Mealtimes can be a difficult time for former smokers, since many are in the habit of lighting up at the conclusion of a meal. Try to develop a new habit in its place – perhaps clean your teeth and enjoy the feeling of having a clean taste in your mouth, or phone someone for a chat.

- **Don't get complacent**  
Just because you've been smoke-free for a while, don't think that "just one cigarette won't hurt". As with former alcoholics, just one dose of the addictive substance (nicotine) is all it takes to make you addicted again. Should you slip up and find yourself smoking a cigarette, don't look upon it as failure and give up. See it as a single mistake, and resolve to keep trying – throw away the rest of the cigarettes in the pack and start again.
- **Look to the future**  
Look ahead to the time when it will be much easier. After a couple of weeks the physical cravings will have gone, but it is easy at this point for the novelty of being a non-smoker to wear off. Smoking is also a psychological addiction, and some former smokers report that they can still get occasional cravings years later, even though the nicotine has long since gone from their body. Don't throw away all you have achieved. Remind yourself of all the reasons you had for giving up smoking, revel in your new health and freedom, and congratulate yourself your success.

## Cigar Smoking

As has already been noted, those on a lower income, or in unskilled professions, are the most likely to smoke cigarettes. However, this is not true of cigar smoking which is most common among males aged 35-64 with higher than average incomes and education. Cigar smoking is actually on the increase, unlike cigarette smoking which is decreasing.

Three-quarters of those who smoke cigars do so only occasionally, and the majority of all cigar smokers do not inhale the smoke. Because of this there is often a perception that cigar smoking is safer than cigarette smoking. This is not entirely true, however, for several reasons.

- Cigars may contain up to 17 times more tobacco than cigarettes, and take up to 2 hours to smoke. This means that one cigar can be the equivalent of smoking an entire pack of cigarettes.
- Although incidence of lung cancer is lower in cigar smokers than cigarette smokers (but still double that of non-smokers), cigar smoking has been shown to cause cancers of the mouth, larynx and oesophagus.
- The secondhand smoke from a cigar is more concentrated and more toxic than that of a cigarette.
- Cigars can be just as addictive as cigarettes. They contain over ten times more nicotine which can be inhaled through the roof of the mouth even if the smoker does not inhale.
- It has been shown that cigarette smokers who give up and switch to cigars are twice as likely to return to smoking cigarettes as those who did not use cigars. In addition cigar smokers are more than twice as likely to take up smoking cigarettes as non-smokers who never use cigars.

## Pipe Smoking

Only 3% of smokers smoke a pipe, most of them men over 60 and many of them considering it a specialised hobby rather than a habit. However the dangers of pipe smoking are greater than those of cigar smoking (although still less than those of cigarettes) with the risk of lung cancer five times greater than for a non-smoker, and further significantly increased risks of cancers of the colon, throat and pancreas.

## Workplace Smoking Policy

Although it is illegal to smoke on public premises and thus many workplace smoking policies are no longer required, Employers should consider other aspects of the way smoking affects work. For example, if a lawyer is a smoker, is he in the habit of taking regular cigarette breaks outside the building where he may be seen by clients entering the premises? Is his addiction interfering with his work – for example, if he regularly misses phone calls because he is so often away from his desk?

Employers may consider putting in place a new policy which states that employees should not take breaks to smoke, but instead may smoke only during their lunch hour, and only when a certain distance from the workplace. Neither should employees come into work smelling strongly of tobacco smoke, since this can be very off-putting to colleagues and clients. It should be made clear to those who smoke that they will be supported and encouraged in their efforts to give up, perhaps by allowing time off to attend support groups or by making a donation to a Cancer charity for each person who successfully stops smoking.

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