

Tobacco Use and Head and Neck Cancer Treatment

Treatment for Head and Neck Cancer can be difficult. People often feel that smoking calms them and reduces their stress, but the use of tobacco harms nearly every organ of the body, causing many diseases and affecting the health of tobacco users in general.

There are many different chemicals in tobacco smoke. When you smoke, the chemicals go into your body. Two of these chemicals are nicotine and carbon monoxide. Breaking the tobacco habit means creating new behaviors to replace it. Quitting tobacco has instant, as well as, long-term benefits for you and your loved ones.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about quit aids and nicotine replacement products. Some products are available without a prescription. Your health care team can help you learn healthy strategies to cope with stress and give you information about support groups, website resources and smart phone apps to help you quit.

Quitting tobacco use before you begin treatment for head and neck cancer has many benefits including:

- Quicker healing after surgery
- Lower risk of infection after surgery
- Reduced side effects from treatment
- Improved chance of survival

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

Quitting Smoking Before Surgery

Your blood vessels carry oxygen and nutrients to all parts of your body. When you use tobacco, the nicotine causes your blood vessels to tighten and narrow. When this happens, there is less oxygen going to your body's cells, tissues and organs. Using tobacco before surgery can increase the risk of problems after your surgery. **It is important to stop using tobacco (cigarettes, cigars, pipes and smokeless tobacco) at least 4 weeks before your surgery for the following reasons:**

- The carbon monoxide inhaled when you smoke lowers the oxygen level in your body. This can cause your blood pressure to go up and make your heart work harder.
- Your body needs oxygen to help fight infection and heal. Surgical wounds can take longer to heal when oxygen levels in the body are low.
- Smoking can put you at risk for these health issues after surgery:
 - ▶ Pneumonia or lung problems
 - ▶ Heart problems
 - ▶ Stroke
 - ▶ Blood clots
 - ▶ Wound infection and slow healing
- It is also important to stay away from secondhand smoke. Wound dressings can absorb smoke from cigarettes, cigars or pipes and may cause problems with wound healing.

Tobacco Use and Cancer Treatment

Research by The American Cancer Society has shown the following effects for head and neck cancer patients who continue to use tobacco during treatment:

- Lower oxygen levels caused by tobacco use make radiation and chemotherapy less likely to kill the cancer cells and treatment less effective.
- Treatment side effects are worse for patients who use tobacco during treatment.
- People who continue to smoke are more likely to get another cancer.

Tips for Quitting

Quitting is easier if you prepare. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- **Set a quit date to stop using tobacco.** This will give you time to prepare. Pick a date that is less busy or stressful and does not include a social situation (a night out with friends) that may tempt you to use tobacco.
- **On your quit day, change your regular routine.** Get out of the house and go to a movie or to dinner at a tobacco-free restaurant.
- **Get rid of all ashtrays, lighters, spit cups and all tobacco products** in your home, car and work place.
- **Tell others you are quitting.** Support is important to successful quitting. Share with your family and friends how they can help you stop using tobacco.
- **Create a tobacco-free zone where you live.** Make a rule that tobacco can only be used outside, not inside your home or car.
- **Use an aid to help you quit. You may find it helpful to** buy nicotine gum, nicotine lozenges and nicotine patches at the drug store.
- **Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about medicines to help you stop using tobacco.**
- **Keep track of the times you use tobacco.** You may find it helpful to keep a record of the times you use tobacco. Write down how you feel when you use tobacco and what you are doing before and during your use of tobacco. Use this information to help understand what triggers your tobacco use and to develop new behaviors to help handle these situations.

Resources to Help You Quit

Quit Lines:

- **American Lung Association** 1-800-586-4872
- **BeTobaccoFree.gov Smoking Quit Line** 1-877-448-7848
- **Ohio Tobacco Quit Line** 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)
- **Quit for Life program from the American Cancer Society**
1-800-227-2345

Ohio State Clinics:

- **Ross Heart Hospital Smoking Cessation Clinic**
420 W. 10th Ave
Columbus, OH 43210
614-293-0932
- **The Lung Center, Tobacco Dependence Clinic**
2050 Kenny Road,
Suite 2200
Columbus, OH 43221
614-293-4925

Websites:

- March of Dimes at:
<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/smoking-during-pregnancy.aspx>
- MedlinePlus at:
<https://medlineplus.gov/quittingsmoking.html>
- Ohio Partners for Smoke Free Families at:
<http://ohiosmokefreefamilies.org/>
- Smokefree.gov

Mobile apps:

Search your mobile device's app store for quit smoking apps, such as **QuitGuide** and **QuitSTART**.