



Supporting someone with a mental illness to quit smoking

It is up to the smoker to decide whether they want to change their smoking habits. You cannot make someone quit. But there are ways you can provide support. It will help if you:

- learn about the process of quitting
- are supportive and encouraging
- avoid being critical or negative
- avoid telling them what they 'should' do – instead offer strategies and information.

Supporters often say the hardest part of helping someone who is trying to quit is staying positive. It's not always easy, especially with the added challenges that mental illness brings.

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Smoking and mental illness

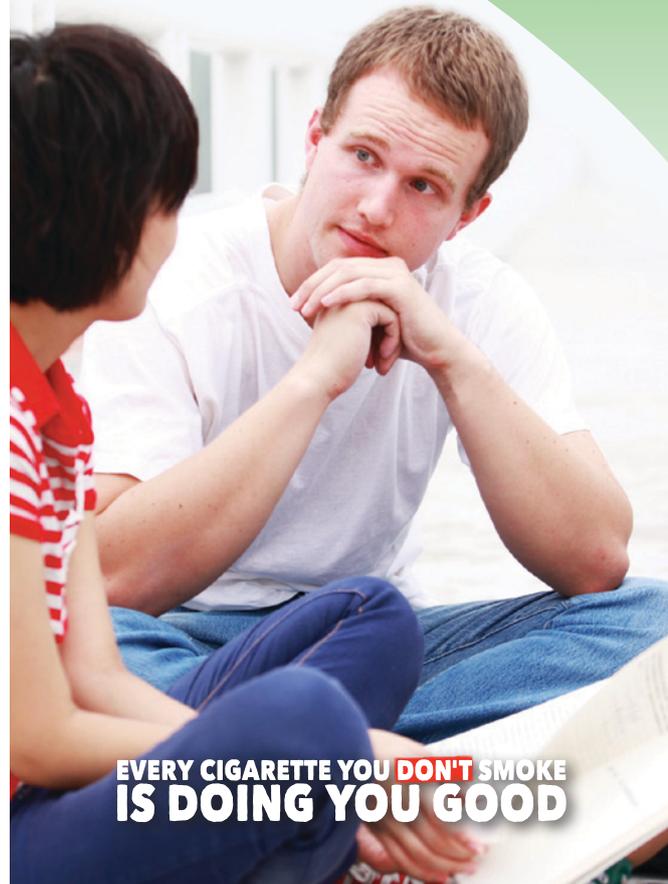
Smoking rates among people with a mental illness are high. There are many reasons for this, such as smoking to cope with stress and anxiety. However, there is strong evidence that many people with a mental illness want to quit and that smoking causes, rather than relieves, stress.¹ Encourage the smoker to start their quitting journey by highlighting the reasons to stop smoking, including:

- improving their physical health and decreasing their chance of smoking-related illness
- saving money they normally spend on cigarettes for personal treats or to help with other expenses such as rent and bills
- gaining a sense of achievement and pride; and looking, feeling and smelling better.



Establish an agreement

Ask the person who is quitting how they would like you to help. Your role may be different if you are the smoker's key worker than if you are their friend or partner. It will probably work better for both of you if you come to an agreement about the type of support offered. One option is to establish a quitting contract that sets dates and goals for both of you.



Tackling obstacles

It is helpful to discuss potential obstacles at this stage, rather than waiting for them to arise. Obstacles for the person quitting can include:

- feeling pressured by your expectations
- feeling bad about themselves if they don't attain their goals
- that the supporter does not know what to do or say
- that the supporter worries too much about the person quitting becoming stressed and unwell.

Work out how you will handle each situation. What does the quitter want from you in difficult times? Is it to back off, or to keep on encouraging? Is it to just acknowledge that they are struggling? Understand that you may need a break from supporting, or reassurance and support for yourself, at some point in the process.

Ways of supporting

There are a number of ways you can support someone with a mental illness to quit smoking. It's up to you to decide the most appropriate approach. Support options include:

- 'Spark plug'** enthusiastically 'firing up' and encouraging the person to quit.
- 'Coach'** helping to 'teach' the benefits of quitting and working with the smoker every step of the way.
- 'Cheer squad'** barracking from the sidelines.
- 'Boosters'** once the person has made change, giving support and applause to boost confidence.
- 'Bystander'** supporting, but understanding too much involvement may be unhelpful.

Important things to remember

- » Encourage the person to talk to their doctor if they want to cut down or quit, and to have regular appointments.
- » Some people want to quit but lack the confidence. Let them know that, with the right information and support, mental illness is no barrier to quitting.
- » Learn to distinguish between nicotine withdrawal symptoms and symptoms of mental illness. Withdrawal symptoms may include coughing, restlessness, difficulty sleeping and concentrating, and feeling irritable, anxious or angry. Symptoms will get easier after a few days and disappear in a few weeks.
- » Listen to how the smoker would like to quit – gradually or all at once? Reducing smoking is also a good start on the journey to becoming a non-smoker.
- » Don't get into a position where you argue with the person. Positive and open communication is the key to being an effective supporter.
- » Suggest strategies or provide information, rather than give direct advice.
- » Encourage the smoker to draw on other support in the community, such as Quitline or a community-based mental health service.

You can suggest the following resources to the person you are supporting:

Quitline

Quitline is a confidential telephone service that provides information, advice and counselling services for people who want to quit smoking. You can phone the Quitline on **13 7848** from anywhere in Australia for the cost of a local call.

Quitline counsellors have received special training to enable them to provide advice to people with a mental illness.

Callers to the Quitline can arrange to have the 'Quit Book' mailed to them and if they want to talk to someone about quitting, they will be given information on:

- the best way to quit
- coping with withdrawal symptoms
- quit courses and details of local organisations which provide individual help and counselling.

Online motivation

The **Quit Now Calculator** allows the user to select a savings goal (like a motorbike or a deposit on a house) and calculates the amount currently spent on smoking, and the time it would take to reach the savings goal if they were to stop smoking. Available on www.quitnow.gov.au and can be linked to other websites or intranets.

An app to help you quit

The Quit Now: **My QuitBuddy** is a personalised interactive app with quit tips, daily motivational messages and countdown to quitting reminders. The user records their goals in pictures, words or audio messages; and can use the 'Back Me Up' button for a range of distractions when they get a craving. Call the Quitline **13 7848** or a buddy from the app, or post a note on the community board. Download **My QuitBuddy** free on an iPhone or iPad from iTunes.

For more information or to download copies of this fact sheet visit www.quitnow.gov.au or www.sane.org



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing



Quitline 13 7848
australia.gov.au/quitnow