



Campaigning  
For Equality

# Women's Equality Women's Health – Women and Smoking



An advice leaflet  
for Usdaw Members



# Why women smoke...

## Women start and keep smoking for a variety of reasons:

- Smoking can be seen as an 'adult activity'. It is significant that many women start smoking between the ages of 16 and 20, thinking perhaps that it makes them look older and more grown up.
- Women sometimes use cigarettes to feel more confident, socially.
- "To calm my nerves", "To help me cope", "To stop me losing my temper" are some of the phrases used by women to explain their dependency on cigarettes.

Whatever the reasons why women start smoking, the reason why many of us keep smoking is the same – smoking is more than a habit, it's an addiction. The addictive part of the cigarette is the nicotine. After a while a person becomes hooked and gets a pleasurable feeling when smoking.

This is partly what makes the thought of stopping frightening – it's the thought that life will never be the same again, that we won't be able to concentrate, handle stress or be as confident or as sociable without cigarettes ...

## BUT...

Stopping smoking doesn't mean giving anything up; it doesn't mean depriving yourself of anything.

In fact the opposite is true. By stopping smoking you make positive gains; you'll notice big improvements in your:

- Health – stopping smoking vastly reduces the risk of illness and disability.
- Wealth – smoking is expensive and getting more expensive all the time.
- Confidence – smoking doesn't improve confidence but damages it – smokers are more likely to be on edge in social situations than non smokers.
- Appearance – say goodbye to stained teeth, wrinkles and the smell of stale tobacco.
- Energy levels – smoking zaps your energy levels.





## Smoking is a health issue for women

- One in four smokers can expect to die as a result of smoking.
- Over a quarter of all cancer deaths are caused by smoking. After breast cancer, lung cancer is the next leading cause of death from cancer for women.
- Women who smoke and use the contraceptive pill multiply their risk of both heart attacks and strokes.
- Smoking may contribute to increased risk of cancer of the cervix.
- Smoking may affect a woman's fertility.
- Smoking may cause osteoporosis and brittle bones.
- Smoking during pregnancy has adverse effects on the baby.
- Children of smokers are more likely to get bronchitis, pneumonia and other chest infections than the children of non-smokers.
- Smoking has been identified as a risk factor in causing sudden infant death syndrome (cot death).

### Gloomy news, but ...

**Each woman who stops smoking can reduce her chances of being part of these statistics and improves not only her health but also the health of those around her.**

## How to stop

Different things work for different women but the following tips might be of some help:

- It's important to understand your smoking before you stop. Keep a smoking diary for a week, noting down when you smoke, where you are, who you are with and how you felt before and after smoking. You may spot patterns, triggers or habits.
- If you notice smoking triggers, write down how you could deal with them if you were to stop smoking – a good way to break a habit is to replace it with a new one.
- It's also helpful to choose a target date for stopping smoking, perhaps a month ahead. Try to anticipate any event that might lead to failure. Try not to fall into the trap of just saying 'Not now, later' and putting it out of your mind. Work out your timetable.
- Nicotine is eliminated from your body as quickly as 48 hours after your last cigarette. There is no physical pain in the withdrawal from nicotine. Instead withdrawal is experienced as an empty, restless feeling, the feeling of something missing. These withdrawal symptoms are uncomfortable but they will eventually subside over the next two to three weeks. Beware of cutting down. Trying to cut down gradually is likely to just prolong the withdrawal process.

## Stopping smoking – some tips

Many women would like to stop smoking and try to do so. They may not succeed at first, but the evidence is that the more often people try to stop the more likely they are to succeed. Research tells us that practice makes perfect. Some women fear that stopping smoking will mean gaining weight. Research shows that up to half of those who stop smoking report no weight change! Many people actually lose weight. There is no simple solution to stopping smoking, but women who have tried and been successful offer the following advice:

- Never doubt or question your decision to stop – remind yourself every day of how good it feels to be free from cigarettes.
- Remember you have not given anything up – you are making positive gains.
- Never say the odd cigarette won't matter – cigarettes are addictive – one always leads to another.
- Tell yourself you are a non-smoker – from the minute you put out your last cigarette you are.
- Don't envy other smokers – the vast majority of smokers actually want to stop and envy your freedom as a non-smoker.
- If you have a bad day after stopping, remind yourself you had bad days when you smoked (otherwise you wouldn't have decided to stop).

# Helplines, counselling and other support

**There are local and national organisations, such as Quitline, that can offer advice and support to help you give up smoking.**

Information is available from freephone helplines. They also offer a variety of 'quit tools' such as booklets and leaflets, email support and online collections of top quitting tips.

Your GP or practice nurse can also refer you to the NHS Stop Smoking Service, which provides counselling and support to smokers who want to quit. Some surgeries also have dedicated stop smoking clinics.

Alternatively you can contact these services by telephone or online. See the section opposite.

Helplines are also available in languages other than English.



## Further information

- NHS Free Smoking Helpline: 0300 123 1044 website: [www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk)

## Sources and useful publications

- Factsheets from 'Action on smoking and health'. website: [www.ash.org.uk](http://www.ash.org.uk)
- Smoking and cancer – 'Children and smoking'. Cancer Research UK. website: [www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)
- Healthy Lives, Healthy People website: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
- Smoking cessation – Clinical Knowledge Summaries. website: [cks.nice.org.uk](http://cks.nice.org.uk)



# Usdaw contacts

To find out more about the work of the Divisional Equalities Forums and Usdaw's equality work or about joining Usdaw contact:

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