

## SMOKING & YOUR SPINE

### WHY STOP SMOKING?

Smoking is well known to be linked with serious **health problems** including cancer, heart disease, stroke, and emphysema.

It is also very **expensive** – Smoking **25 cigarettes a day** can cost **over AU\$14,000 a year**.

Smoking **speeds up spine degeneration**, causing symptoms of back and leg pain, and/or neck and arm pain to worsen.

Smoking also **increases the risks of spine surgery**, including:

- Increased chest infection, heart and lung complications, clots (DVT / PE)
- Increased wound problems and infection
- Poor nerve recovery
- Poor bone healing. Increased non-union
- Increased hardware failure
- Poorer outcome and duration of benefit after surgery



Unfortunately, this means that if you are a current smoker, you may not be a candidate for certain surgical procedures, unless you stop smoking.

### Assemble Your Team.

When quitting smoking, it is important to have a good support team around you. Ask the following people for their help and support:

- Family and Friends
- General practitioner
- Counsellors and Psychologists

### Do Nicotine Substitutes or Vaping Help?

Well, yes and no. Nicotine substitutes and vaping may be less harmful because they do not expose you to the full cocktail of harmful chemicals in cigarettes.

However, nicotine does still impair nerve recovery and bone healing. For the purposes of spine surgery, the presence of nicotine substitutes may still limit your surgical options.



## BREAKING THE CYCLE

Stopping smoking is hard. It may take a few attempts to succeed. There are two main parts to quitting smoking. For the best chance of success, it is important that you tackle **both**.

### Nicotine Craving.

Nicotine is the main addictive part of smoking. Over time, the body becomes used to regular “hits” of nicotine. This is why people get **withdrawal** (worst in the first week) when they stop smoking.

There are many options to help lower nicotine withdrawals (such as patches, gum, and tablets). **Talk to your general practitioner** about what options are available. Sometimes it can take a couple of tries to find the option that works best for you.



### Habits & Triggers.

Identifying and addressing your habits and triggers will give you a better chance of quitting smoking.

Some people have smoking built into their **regular daily routines**.

Other people smoke more during **certain situations** (e.g. having a coffee, having a break at work, or when socialising).

Sometimes people smoke more based on **certain feelings** (e.g. sad, angry, stressed, uncomfortable, bored, or wanting to relax).



## SO, WHAT NOW?

It is strongly recommended that you team-up with your **General Practitioner**, for the best chance at success in quitting smoking.

Here are some resources that you may also find useful as a starting point:

- **Quitline**
  - Ask your General Practitioner for a referral
  - Phone 13 78 48
- **Top 6 Hacks for Quitting**
  - <https://www.quit.org.au/articles/stuck-quitting-read-6-best-hacks-quit-smoking-once-and-all/>
- **Quit Savings Calculator**
  - <https://www.makesmokinghistory.org.au/why-quit/to-save-money/quit-savings-calculator>