EquaHeart

Smoking and your heart

Smoking is a leading preventable cause of heart attack and stroke. Stopping at any age protects your heart, and the benefits begin within a day.

46,000
Canadians die each year from tobacco use

½
The risk of smoking-related heart disease is halved one year after stopping

15 years
after stopping, heart disease risk is the same as for a person who has never smoked

1 Benefits of smoking cessation (stopping smoking)

20 min	8 hours	24 hours	2–12 weeks	1 year	5 years	15 years
Blood pressure begins to fall	Carbon monoxide falls; oxygen level returns to normal	Heart attack risk begins to decline	Airways relax; breathing improves	**Heart disease risk halved**	**Stroke risk equals a never-smoker's**	**Heart risk equals a never-smoker's**

Timeline from the Canadian Pharmacists Association, based on Health Canada.

2 How smoking harms the heart

Raises blood pressure
Each cigarette increases blood pressure and heart rate.

Reduces oxygen
Carbon monoxide lowers the oxygen carried in the blood, so the heart must work harder.

Damages blood vessels
Promotes plaque and blood clots, leading to heart attack, stroke and peripheral artery disease (poor circulation in the legs).

3 Treatments that help

Combining behavioural support with medication is the most effective approach. Options recommended in Canada:

- **Nicotine replacement therapy** (patch, gum, lozenge, inhaler or spray), alone or in combination.
- **Prescription medications:** varenicline or bupropion.
- **Cytisine**, a plant-derived natural health product.
- **Behavioural support** in person, by telephone or by text message.

E-cigarettes (vaping) are not recommended as a first choice. They may be considered if other methods have not worked, with the goal of stopping vaping as well.

4 Planning to stop

- Choose a quit date and inform people who can support you.
- Identify your triggers (such as coffee, stress or alcohol) and plan alternatives.
- A relapse is not a failure. Identify what led to it and try again.

FREE SUPPORT ACROSS CANADA

1-866-366-3667

gosmokefree.gc.ca/quit

Free and confidential. Your pharmacist or doctor can also help you choose a medication.

Sources: Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care. Recommendations on tobacco cessation interventions for adults. CMAJ 2025. Health Canada, World No Tobacco Day statement, May 2026. Canadian Pharmacists Association, Risks of smoking and benefits of quitting (citing Health Canada).
This guide is general information and does not replace advice from your healthcare provider.

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