Western Cape Government
Education
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5 tips for going tobacco-free

Good news for smokers! The UK National Health Service (NHS) announced, "New research reveals smokers can expect positive changes as soon as 2 weeks after quitting, including having more energy (45%), feeling healthier (42%) and improved breathing (42%)".

But although there are great reasons to quit, there are still many people who continue to smoke or vape.

Writing for the Mayo Clinic, psychiatrist Patrick Bigaouette says, "Becoming smoke-free is a process. Developing a quit plan can help you prepare and follow through with your decision to quit."

1. Choose your quit date

Why is it so hard to quit? Bigaouette explains, "Nicotine stimulates the reward pathway in the brain, releasing dopamine, which feels good."

Cravings follow. But "when the harmful effects outweigh what you gain from smoking … you're ready" to quit. He recommends being realistic: "Give yourself some time to get your quit plan in place".

2. Add up how much smoking is costing you

Smoking takes a toll on your health, explains Bigaouette. He lists higher risks for lung disease, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. And then there's the financial costs, which can add up.

3. Know your triggers

The US National Cancer Institute has a quit-smoking website called Smokefree. It explains that the urge to smoke can be triggered by:

- **Emotions** like feeling bored or anxious – slowing your breathing, talking about your feelings, or exercising may help.
- **Times you'd smoke,** like when driving, watching TV, or drinking coffee – try instead to chew gum, keep your hands busy with a squeeze ball or change your routine.
- **Socialising,** like going to a bar or a party – avoid places where people smoke and ask your friends not to smoke around you.

The sight or smell of smoking can also trigger withdrawal cravings. "Find something to take your mind off the craving", suggests Smokefree. "See if nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) is right for you – it can reduce withdrawal symptoms."

4. Set yourself up for success

Bigaouette recommends you "find someone to quit with you, join a social media or online support group, or seek counseling to help you cope with triggers, withdrawal and emotional challenges." Above all, adds Bigaouette, "Be kind to yourself", and reach out to your doctor if more help is needed.