



How does smoking affect how your brain works?

Over time, tobacco smoking causes changes in the brain and harms its ability to function. It can:

- Slow your ability to process information
- Damage your memory
- Make it harder for you to focus on tasks

You might notice that right after smoking, you feel more alert and find it easier to focus. This is because you have stopped symptoms of nicotine withdrawal such as feeling irritated and restless. Nicotine withdrawal affects your mood and can impair how well your brain functions in the short-term.

How does smoking affect your risk for dementia?

Dementia is a broad term and there are different diseases that fall under it. When a person experiences, a loss of cognitive functions like memory, problem-solving abilities, and language so severe it stops them from doing normal daily activities, this is considered dementia. These symptoms usually begin later in life and increase over time. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia and was the sixth leading cause of death in U.S. adults in 2019.

When you smoke, you increase your risk for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Smoking is estimated to account for more than one out of every ten cases of Alzheimer's disease in the world.

What impact will quitting smoking have on your brain health?

When you quit smoking, you reduce your risk for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, even if you are older. Within 10 years, your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease will become equal to that of someone who has never smoked.

Quitting also slows your rate of cognitive decline. Over time, the effects of smoking on your brain's ability to function will fade. Right after quitting, you may have trouble focusing as your body is still coping with withdraw from nicotine. Using medications like nicotine replacement therapy can help manage this symptom.

I want to quit using smoking—how do I get started?

- Talk to your VA health care provider about cessation medications and counseling to treat your tobacco use.
- Call VA's tobacco quitline at **1-855-QUIT-VET** (1-855-784-8838) Monday–Friday. Available in English & Spanish.
- Sign up for VA's SmokefreeVET text messaging program— text the word **VET** to **47848** (manda **VETesp** al **47848** para ayuda en español) or visit smokefree.gov/VET

