**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

**Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**

**Tobacco and Health Program**

 **Great American Smokeout Toolkit Materials**

External Newsletter Content

**Solutions, Services, and Support To Stop Smoking**

If you smoke, you probably remember your first cigarette. Now, let the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) help you remember your last.

Join us for the [Great American Smokeout](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/great-american-smokeout.asp) on November 19 and learn about effective methods to stop smoking — for good. With medications, programs, and resources specifically designed for Veterans, VA can help you make this lifestyle improvement, for not only your physical health but also, surprisingly, your mental health.

Stamping out your last cigarette isn’t easy, but VA is committed to providing [the tools and expertise to help you](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/index.asp) every step of the way. VA offers medications to help curb your cravings, mobile phone apps to get support when you need a motivational boost, and one of the most effective methods for quitting tobacco: cessation counseling.

**Benefits of Counseling**

According to the [National Institute on Drug Abuse](https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2018/09/recent-research-sheds-new-light-why-nicotine-so-addictive), one reason it’s so difficult to stop smoking is that “smokers’ brains have *learned* to smoke. Just like unlearning to ride a bike, it is incredibly hard to unlearn that simple, mildly rewarding behavior of lighting up a cigarette,”

To modify that behavior, experts say a combination of approaches that includes tobacco cessation counseling usually works best. Research has shown:

* Combining [counseling and medication](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PMKz7jR5rc&list=PL3AQ_JVoBEyxgnvlw6S49-rQijhsAo1Bs&index=2) works better than using medication alone.
* Self-help techniques, group counseling, and telephone counseling are more likely to work than stopping smoking “cold turkey” without assistance.
* Counseling — even with a health care provider who does not specialize in therapy — can significantly improve one’s chance of quitting.

Veterans should work with their VA care teams to determine the type of counseling that is best for them.

**Counseling: What To Expect**

Cessation counseling is focused on the role that tobacco plays in a smoker’s daily routine and then tailoring a quit plan to fit into their everyday life. Counseling can come in a variety of forms, ranging from brief counseling with a primary care provider to individual or group counseling formats and even counseling by phone or through VA Video Connect.

VA’s tobacco cessation counselors typically discuss activities or situations that trigger someone who uses tobacco to light up, such as talking on the phone, drinking coffee or alcohol, or feeling bored or stressed. Counseling usually includes developing strategies for coping with those triggers and making the long-term behavioral changes needed to stop smoking for good. Cessation counselors may also recommend [nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)](https://veterans.smokefree.gov/tools-tips-vet/quit-for-good-with-nrt) or prescribe medication to help relieve the symptoms that come with nicotine withdrawal.

“This program works,” said one Veteran, who smoked up to three packs a day for 44 years. He had tried to give up cigarettes many times before he was able to stop for good with VA’s help in 2012. “I felt better than I had in years.”

**Cessation Support Designed for Veterans**

VA provides a wide range of services for Veterans who wish to stop smoking, including a wealth of information and support [online](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/index.asp) and programs available through local VA health care facilities. Resources include:

* **[Counseling](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/how-to-quit.asp):** When combined with another cessation tool, such as medication or NRT products, counseling offers Veterans the best chance of becoming and staying smoke-free. VA offers group and individual counseling to talk about using tobacco and ways to stop, identifying and coping with triggers, and making lifestyle changes that can help Veterans remain tobacco-free. Tobacco cessation counseling is routinely provided through VA medical centers and community-based outpatient clinics.
* [**Medications**](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/how-to-quit.asp) **and** [**NRT**](https://veterans.smokefree.gov/tools-tips-vet/quit-for-good-with-nrt)**:** VA offers medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration — including bupropion, varenicline, and NRT gum, patches, and lozenges — to help with nicotine withdrawal symptoms and cravings that come with quitting.Your VA provider can guide you through the available options and help you decide which one is likely to work best for you.
* [**Quit VET**](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/quit-vet.asp)**:** Veterans can call 1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838) to receive tobacco cessation counseling and get help building their plan to quit. Quitline counselors are available Monday through Friday, between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. Eastern time, to help Veterans prepare for potential challenges and avoid relapse. These trained tobacco cessation counselors offer continued support through follow-up calls and counseling.
* [**SmokefreeVET**](https://smokefree.gov/tools-tips-vet/smokefreevet)**:** For tools and tips to quit, Veterans can sign up for SmokefreeVET by texting VET to 47848. SmokefreeVET provides regular text messages as well as extra support at Veterans’ fingertips when they text the keywords URGE, STRESS, or SMOKED to 47848. *Para inscribirse en SmokefreeVET en español, manda el texto VETesp al 47848.*

Talk with your provider about which of VA’s tobacco cessation options may best meet your needs.