

Understanding Smoking and Your Health

During your workplace medical assessment today, you were asked about smoking because it can affect your breathing, circulation and overall health.

This leaflet explains how smoking affects your body, the benefits of stopping and where you can find practical support to help you quit.

How does smoking affect your body?

Tobacco smoke contains thousands of chemicals, including tar and carbon monoxide. Many are harmful, and some can cause cancer.

- **Tar** contains toxic chemicals that damage the lungs.
- **Carbon monoxide** reduces the amount of oxygen your blood can carry.
- **Nicotine** is highly addictive and makes it difficult to stop smoking.

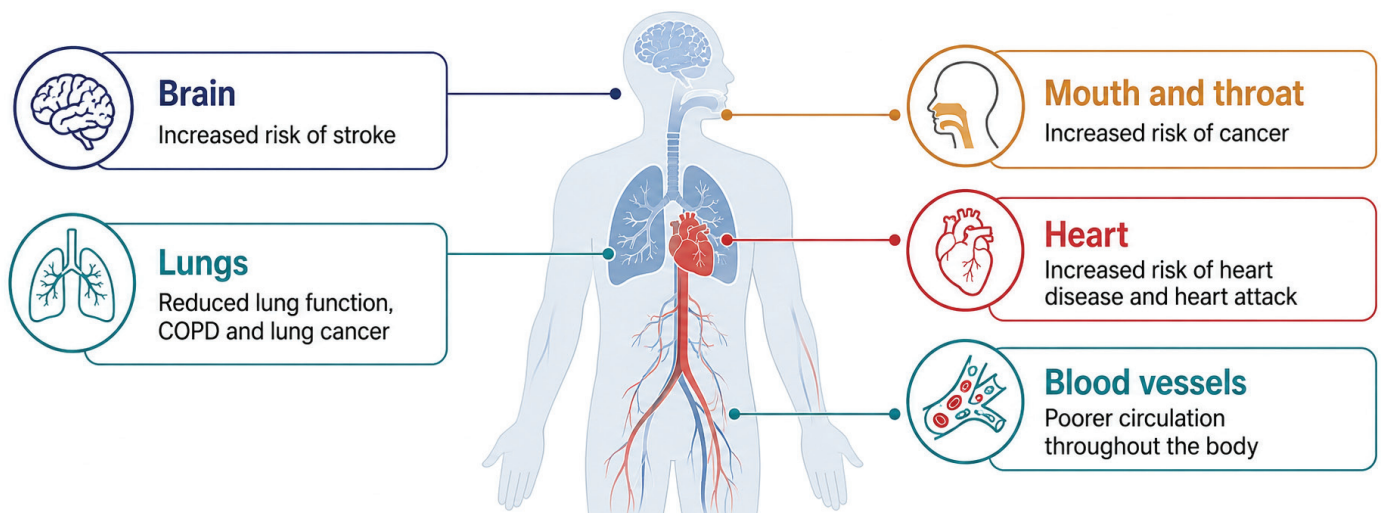
Smoking can damage your lungs, heart and blood vessels. It increases your risk of serious conditions including cancer, heart disease, stroke and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Understanding the effects

Smoking may cause coughing, wheezing and breathlessness. It can reduce lung function, circulation and physical stamina, making activity feel more difficult.

It can also weaken your immune system, increase your risk of respiratory infections and slow your recovery from illness or injury.

The effects vary between individuals and may not always cause noticeable symptoms. Feeling well does not mean that smoking is not affecting your health.



Remember

Stopping smoking is one of the most important things you can do for your health. Your body begins to recover soon after your last cigarette, and the benefits continue to build over time.

Turn over for information about the benefits of stopping and the support available to help you quit.

Benefits of stopping smoking

Stopping smoking benefits your health at any age, regardless of how long you have smoked. Over time, you may:

- breathe more easily and experience less coughing or wheezing
- improve your circulation, energy levels and physical stamina
- reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, lung disease and cancer
- protect other people from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke

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Taking the first step

Having a plan and the right support can make quitting easier:

- Choose a quit date and remove cigarettes, lighters and ashtrays.
- Identify situations that trigger smoking and plan how to manage them.
- Consider stop-smoking aids to help control cravings and withdrawal symptoms.
- If you have a setback, try again and seek additional support if needed.

What about vaping?

Nicotine vaping is less harmful than smoking and can help adults to quit. To gain the full benefit, you should stop smoking cigarettes completely rather than continuing to smoke and vape.

Support is available

Your GP, pharmacist or local stop-smoking service can help you choose suitable support. This may include nicotine replacement products, stop-smoking medicines, vaping and expert advice.

You can also use the NHS Quit Smoking app or create a free Personal Quit Plan at:

www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/

Remember

You do not have to quit smoking unaided. A combination of professional support and stop-smoking products can improve your chances of stopping successfully.

This leaflet provides general guidance following your workplace medical assessment and does not replace advice from your GP or another qualified healthcare professional. Information based on current NHS guidance. Review date: July 2026.



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