

# Smoking and COVID-19

## For people with cancer who smoke or use tobacco

Read this brochure to know:

- what is COVID-19
- how quitting smoking can protect you from COVID-19
- know the benefits of quitting smoking
- how your health care team can help you quit
- resources and programs to help you quit

## **What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is a new coronavirus first detected in late 2019. Coronaviruses are a type of virus that can cause the common cold, bronchitis, pneumonia and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

## **How can quitting smoking help protect me from COVID-19?**

People with cancer who have COVID-19 and smoke may develop more serious symptoms than non-smokers.

- When you smoke, your fingers frequently touch your mouth and lips, which raises the risk of transferring the virus from your hand to your mouth.
- Sharing cigarettes, e-cigarette products, pipes or mouth pieces with other people may also increase your risk of getting COVID-19.
- People who smoke are more likely to develop respiratory (lung) infections in general. Smoking, vaping or using e-cigarettes can increase your risk of a respiratory infection such as COVID-19.
- Smoking weakens your immune system (the system that helps your body fight infections). When your immune system is weak, you are more likely to get sick and it can take longer for you to get better.
- Smoking damages your lungs and can destroy your lungs ability to fight infections. Smoking can also affect how well your body uses oxygen properly.

## **What are the benefits of quitting smoking if I am being treated for cancer?**

Some medical treatments, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, can weaken your immune system. The immune system can stay weakened for weeks after treatment. A weakened immune system puts you at a higher risk of getting the virus and or you may become sicker or have serious symptoms if you get COVID-19.

Smoking before and during cancer treatments affects your health. Smoking:

- slows healing
- makes your recovery time longer
- decreases how well your treatment works
- makes your side effects worse

Quitting smoking and using tobacco during cancer treatments:

- helps your body respond to treatment better
- helps you heal faster
- improves some of your side effects
- lowers your risk of your cancer coming back
- lowers your risk of getting a second cancer

## **How can my health care team help me quit?**

It is never too late to quit smoking.

Your health care team is here to support you. They will:

- ask you about your smoking and tobacco use
- talk to you about how smoking and using tobacco affects your health
- work with you to develop a treatment plan

- suggest resources or programs that may help
- help you become ready to quit

## **What if tobacco use is part of my culture?**

For many Indigenous people, tobacco is a sacred medicine used in ceremonial and spiritual practices. Used in a **traditional** way, tobacco is an important part of healing and wellness. This is very different from **commercial** tobacco, which is not used for spiritual reasons or wellness. Commercial tobacco is also harmful to a person's health.

If you use commercial forms of tobacco, speak with a member of your health care team about programs and resources to support reducing use or quitting. Local indigenous communities and organizations may offer peer support, commercial tobacco reduction programs, and elder supports. A list of resources and supports are included at the end of this brochure.

## **How can I start a plan to quit?**

Many people find it's not easy to quit smoking or stop using tobacco. It may take more than one try to quit.

There are different ways to quit. Some people choose to quit "cold turkey," which means to quit without any type of medicine or counselling. It is the hardest way to quit smoking and stay smoke-free forever.

You are more likely to quit if you have help. What works for you depends on your health, your habits, and other needs. Most people find it helps to have more than one way to quit. You can use these ways to quit before, during and after medical treatment.

Ways to quit:

- **In person, phone or online counselling.** Counselling may make it easier for you to quit smoking. It can help you deal with stress, understand why you smoke, and help you manage mood changes.
- **Medicines.** There are different types of medicines that can be used to help with cravings and the symptoms of quitting. Sometimes medicine costs may be covered. Ask your pharmacist for more information.

For more information about the right options for you, speak to your health care team and use the resources listed at the end of this brochure.

## **How can I help someone quit smoking or using tobacco?**

The choice to stop smoking or using tobacco products is personal.

To help support someone to quit smoking:

- Ask how you can help.
- Be aware of their needs.
- Be a good listener.
- Do not blame or pressure them.
- Do not expose your loved ones to second hand smoke.

## Resources and programs to help you quit

Quitting is one important way to protect you from COVID-19 and get the most out of your treatment. Here is more information to help you to quit smoking and using tobacco products.

- **Telehealth Ontario:** Call the toll-free number to help you quit smoking. Get support from a Care Coach, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Phone: 1 866 797 0000

- **UHN Outpatient Pharmacies:** Ask about getting help from your pharmacist to quit through the Smoking Cessation Program. Services include in person, telephone or email consults using tools, counselling and medicines (if needed) to help you quit.

Princess Margaret Cancer Centre Outpatient Pharmacy  
610 University Avenue, Main Floor – Room M633  
Toronto, ON M5G 2M9  
Phone: 416 946 6593

Toronto General Hospital Outpatient Pharmacy  
585 University Avenue, 1st Floor  
Norman Urquhart Building – Room 2  
Toronto, ON M5G 2N2  
Phone: 416 340 4075

Toronto Western Hospital Outpatient Pharmacy  
399 Bathurst Street, Main Atrium  
Toronto, ON M5T 2S8  
Phone: 416 603 5686

- **Nicotine Dependence Clinic, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH):** The Nicotine Dependence Clinic offers treatment and services delivered by experts to help you quit smoking and using tobacco products. You may also get nicotine Replacement Therapy for free up to 6 months a year as part of the “STOP” program.

175 College Street

Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1P7

Phone: 416 535 8501 extension 77400

Website: [Nicotine Dependence Clinic](https://www.camh.ca/en/your-care/programs-and-services/nicotine-dependence-clinic) (https://www.camh.ca/en/your-care/programs-and-services/nicotine-dependence-clinic)

- **Tobacco-Wise – Indigenous Tobacco Program (at Cancer Care Ontario):** Tobacco-Wise works with First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners to reduce and prevent commercial tobacco addiction. Find online resources and community supports.

Website: [Tobacco-Wise](https://tobacrowise.cancercareontario.ca/en) (https://tobacrowise.cancercareontario.ca/en)

- **Smokers’ Help Line (by the Canadian Cancer Society):** Find online resources and support to help you quit across Ontario. Register on the website or visit [Quit Map](http://www.quitmap.ca) (http://www.quitmap.ca) to find support in your community.

Website: [Smokers’ Help Line](https://www.smokershelpline.ca) (https://www.smokershelpline.ca)

- **Talk Tobacco – Indigenous Quit Smoking and Vaping Support (by the Canadian Cancer Society):** Free, confidential phone service offering culturally appropriate support and information about quitting smoking, vaping and commercial tobacco use to Indigenous communities in Ontario.

Phone: 1 833 998-8255 (TALK)

Website: [Talk Tobacco](http://talktobacco.ca) (http://talktobacco.ca)

- **Quit Smoking to Improve Your Cancer Treatment (eLearning):** Access a 5-minute eLearning course about how quitting smoking improves your cancer treatment.

Website: [Quit Smoking to Improve Your Cancer Treatment](http://www.theprincessmargaret.ca/quitsmoking)  
(<http://www.theprincessmargaret.ca/quitsmoking>)

- **Patient and Family Library – Princess Margaret Cancer Centre**

Phone: 416 946 4501 extension 5383

Email: [Princess Margaret Patient and Family Library](mailto:patienteducation@uhn.ca)  
([patienteducation@uhn.ca](mailto:patienteducation@uhn.ca))

Website: [Princess Margaret Patient and Family Library](https://www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret/PatientsFamilies/Specialized_Program_Services/Pages/princess_margaret_patient_family_library.aspx)  
([https://www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret/PatientsFamilies/Specialized\\_Program\\_Services/Pages/princess\\_margaret\\_patient\\_family\\_library.aspx](https://www.uhn.ca/PrincessMargaret/PatientsFamilies/Specialized_Program_Services/Pages/princess_margaret_patient_family_library.aspx))

- **Princess Margaret Cancer Answers:** Cancer Answers provides high quality cancer information that you can trust. Search for more information about how to quit smoking or using tobacco.

Website: [Princess Margaret Cancer Answers](http://www.pmcanceranswers.ca)  
(<http://www.pmcanceranswers.ca>).

## For more information

If you have questions about changes to your treatment because of COVID-19, please ask your care team.

## Princess Margaret Information Line

The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre now has a Patient Information Line to answer your questions and direct you to places to get support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Call the Info Line at 416 946 4559 between 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday to Friday, to speak with an Information Specialist.

## **UHN Online Screening Tool**

Everyone entering UHN is being screened for COVID-19. This is to keep our patients, visitors and staff safe.

Patients can speak with the entrance screener OR use the [UHN online screening tool](https://uhnpatientscreen.ca) (https://uhnpatientscreen.ca).

No personal information is collected or stored through the screening tool.

Follow 3 easy steps to use the online screening tool:

1. Open your browser on your mobile device and go to the [UHN online screening tool](https://uhnpatientscreen.ca) (https://uhnpatientscreen.ca) within 2 hours of your appointment.
2. Click “Begin” and answer the questions honestly.
3. Show the final page to the entrance screener.

For more information or to provide feedback on this document, please email [UHN Patient Education & Engagement](mailto:pfep@uhn.ca) (pfep@uhn.ca).