

Smoking and IBD

This information sheet is for people who want to learn about the connection between smoking and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Key points

- Everyone with IBD is advised to quit smoking and vaping
- Smoking can worsen IBD symptoms and cause other health problems
- Support is available from your IBD team and Quit, a national organisation that helps Australians stop smoking or vaping.

What is the connection between smoking and IBD?

Cigarettes contain thousands of toxic chemicals with severe health effects. Smoking lowers life expectancy and is a well-known cause of cardiovascular disease and cancer. When you smoke, harmful chemicals are absorbed into the bloodstream and travel all the way down to your gut. This can damage the lining of your gut, disrupt the balance of healthy bacteria in the gut microbiome, and impair your immune system. This puts your gut at risk to harmful substances (like toxins) crossing the intestinal lining, which triggers inflammation and worsens your symptoms.

Crohn's disease

Smoking is a well-established risk factor for developing Crohn's disease. If you already have Crohn's disease, smoking can make the disease more severe and lead to more complications. People who smoke are more likely to need treatment with corticosteroids and immunosuppressants. Smoking can also reduce the effectiveness of Crohn's disease medications (e.g., anti-TNF medications like infliximab), increasing the risk of flare ups and further intestinal damage. There's also a greater chance of requiring surgery, as well as an increased risk of post-surgery complications. Smoking is also linked to a higher risk of developing complications outside the gut, such as osteoporosis. These risks reduce once you quit smoking, no matter how long you've been smoking.

Ulcerative colitis

Some research suggests that current smokers are less likely to develop ulcerative colitis than those who do not smoke. Some studies have also found smokers with ulcerative colitis have lower complication rates (e.g., less flare ups). However, smoking can reduce the effectiveness of medications and increase the risk of post-surgery complications in people with ulcerative colitis. Smoking is not a safe or recommended strategy to prevent or manage ulcerative colitis. If you have ulcerative

colitis and you stop smoking, your symptoms may temporarily worsen. However, the long-term benefits of quitting far outweigh the risks.

What about vaping?

Vaping is generally considered less harmful than smoking traditional cigarettes but has its own risks and is not recommended for people with IBD. Vaping products do not contain tar or carbon monoxide found in cigarettes but do contain many toxic chemicals, some of which are known to cause cancer. Vaping can also cause inflammation in the body, shortness of breath, and permanent lung damage.

Why should I quit smoking?

Improve your health: As soon as you stop smoking, your body starts to heal. Within months and years of quitting, your health risks can return to those of someone who never smoked. You'll most likely experience less flare-ups, have a reduced risk of surgery and IBD complications, and be able to reduce corticosteroid use.

Save money: Smoking is very expensive. Once you quit, you might be surprised at how much money you save. Some people find it motivating to track exactly how much they would have spent on cigarettes and put that money toward something enjoyable, like a meal out, a massage, or a holiday.

Better surgery outcomes: If you're preparing for surgery, quitting smoking is highly recommended to reduce the risk of complications and improve recovery. Post-surgery, the risk of blood clots in the legs and lungs is increased for smokers. People with IBD already have a higher risk of blood clots, and smoking adds to that risk.

Your IBD team can help you make an action plan to stop smoking and support you through the process. They can also recommend products that can help you quit, such as nicotine patches. Support is also available through Quit, a dedicated organisation that helps Australians quit smoking and vaping.

More information about smoking and IBD and how to quit is available through the QR code.

For help or information

Scan QR code for website:



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- [Gut microbiome and IBD](#)

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