

**TOBACCO'S CLOUDY SHADOW:**

A Threat Beyond the Smoker

Tobacco use, an age-old habit, is not just a personal health hazard but a widespread concern affecting families, communities, and the environment. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death, accounting for over 480,000 deaths every year, or about 1 in 5 deaths.



Impact on the Household: Smoke does not stay confined to the smoker. Secondhand smoke, an insidious threat, exposes family members, especially children, to hundreds of harmful chemicals. These chemicals are known to cause numerous health issues in non-smokers, such as respiratory infections, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and developmental conditions.



Threat to the Unborn: Pregnant women who smoke or are exposed to secondhand smoke put their unborn children at heightened risk. This exposure can lead to premature births, low birth weight and developmental anomalies. The toxins from tobacco can permeate the placenta, exposing the fetus to nicotine and other harmful substances having a long-term or life-long impact.



Environmental Consequences: The environmental footprint of smoking is often overlooked. Cigarette butts, the most littered item globally, contain filters that take years to decompose, releasing toxic chemicals into the soil and waterways. Tobacco farming leads to deforestation and uses harmful pesticides, which adversely impact local ecosystems and water resources.



Societal and Economic Strain: Smoking also has, significant societal implications. The healthcare costs associated with treating smoking-related diseases burden the economy. In households where finances are already tight, the expense of maintaining a smoking habit can divert essential resources from necessities like food, education or healthcare.

Clearing the Air: Resources to Kick Tobacco to the Curb

Bidding adieu to tobacco may seem like a herculean task. However, with the right support and resources it is achievable. Abstaining from smoking not only rejuvenates your health but is a step forward for those around you and the environment. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the benefits of smoking cessation are immediately tangible. Within 12 hours of quitting, carbon monoxide levels in the bloodstream drop to normal and your body initiates its healing process.

Puff Out the Smoke, Not the Hope

Quitting tobacco does not mean you are on this journey alone. Numerous resources are available, specifically designed to lend a hand during this transition:

Smokefree Apps and Texts: In today's digital age, your journey to a smoke-free life can be assisted with a few taps on your screen. [Smokefree.gov](https://www.smokefree.gov) has a list of free apps that offer a comprehensive suite of features tailored for smokers embarking on cessation. These apps provide users with real-time stats on money saved, health improvements, and the duration of their smoke-free journey. There is also the option of **text-based support**. Offering daily advice, encouragement and tips directly to your cell phone.

Quitting Tobacco: Making the decision to quit smoking doesn't mean you're alone in the journey. Tobacco Quitlines provide an invaluable lifeline to expert support and guidance. Organizations like the American Lung Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sponsor quitlines where trained professionals offer personalized advice, coping strategies, and information about nicotine replacement therapies. These quitlines, available in many states, offer both scheduled callback sessions and on-demand support, ensuring you have assistance when you need it most.

- **American Lung Association: Lung Helpline & Tobacco Quitline - 1-800-LUNG-USA [586-4872]**
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Tobacco Quitline - 1-800-QUIT-NOW [784-8669]**

Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT): Nicotine, the primary addictive substance in tobacco, is what keeps many smokers hooked. Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) works by delivering a controlled amount of nicotine to your body without the harmful chemicals found in tobacco. This helps ease the withdrawal symptoms and cravings associated with quitting. There are various NRT options available:

- Patches: Worn on the skin and deliver a controlled amount of nicotine throughout the day
- Gum: Chewed to release nicotine and then placed between your cheek and gum to absorb
- Inhalers: A device that releases a vaporized nicotine, mimicking hand-to-mouth action of smoking
- Nasal sprays and lozenges: Other options to consider based on personal preference and medical advice



Remember, consult with your Primary Care Physician (PCP) to discuss what treatments are available and right for you. If you do not have a PCP, you may call the Health Advocate number on your BCBSIL member ID card or log on to Blue Access for MembersSM (BAMSM) [bcbsil.com](https://www.bcbsil.com) and use the Provider Finder. This fast, easy-to-use tool improves members' experience when searching for in-network health care providers.

