



Let's Talk About...

Stress and Tobacco Use

What is stress?

Everyone feels stress—it's a fact of life. Stress comes from both the good and bad things that happen to you. When you aren't sure how to handle events or situations, you worry and feel stress.

How you respond to stress can help you or harm you. No matter how much you might want a stress-free life, you actually need some stress. It can help you get going and get things done.

What is a stressor?

A stressor is a situation or event that makes you feel threatened or challenged. It can be real or imagined.

What is the stress response?

The stress response is the set of changes in your body and mind that happen in response to a threat or stress. It's sometimes called the "fight-or-flight" response.

The stress response protects you in times of real physical danger by preparing the body for action. But it can be just as strong in times of mental or emotional stress.

What does the stress response do to the body?

In a stressful situation, the body makes chemicals that trigger:

- faster heart rate and higher blood pressure
- fast breathing
- sweating
- a sudden rush of strength
- slowed digestion
- dilated (larger) pupils



Why do people who use tobacco believe it helps them relax?

Each time a person goes through nicotine withdrawal, they have symptoms that make them uncomfortable (e.g., restless, irritable, and anxious). They decide to have a smoke/tobacco break. When they have a cigarette, or a dip of smokeless tobacco, the hit of nicotine quickly helps them feel better. Their withdrawal symptoms disappear and they feel calm. But over time, this cycle supports the idea that tobacco helps them deal with the physical symptoms of stress. This makes people believe that using tobacco is a good way to deal with stress, no matter what causes it.

Using tobacco actually causes stress in the body—nicotine makes the heart beat faster and blood pressure go up, which makes the heart work harder. When the heart works harder it needs more oxygen. But if a person is smoking, the carbon monoxide they're breathing in makes it harder for the body to absorb oxygen, and this causes extra stress.

There are other healthy things you can do to make yourself feel better!

How can I manage stress without tobacco?

Here are some ideas to help you cope with stress:

- Practise deep breathing.
- Get active. (Walking, running, yoga, sports, and other activities can help you cope with stress.)
- Talk to somebody about it.
- Have an action plan for managing your stress.
- Make time to do the things you like.
- Get outside in nature.
- Eat healthy and limit caffeine.
- Get enough sleep.
- Make a "to do" list each day. Check off things you've done to see everything you've accomplished.
- Imagine being somewhere you love.

For more information and support, visit albertaquits.ca.



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