You're Never Too Old to Quit Smoking

If you've been smoking for decades, you may feel like it's too late to quit. Maybe you think the damage is done as far as your health is concerned, and you're too set in your ways to change.

The truth is that your body will start to recover whenever you stop smoking. Millions of seniors successfully quit, and you can too.

In fact, an aging population is creating more interest and options for seniors who want to give up tobacco. Organizations like the National Institutes of Health and American Lung Association have created special websites and other tools especially for smokers over 50. Take advantage of the growing number of resources, and put these pointers to work for you.

Benefits of Quitting Smoking for Seniors

Giving up cigarettes is good for your health at any age, but especially for seniors. Many conditions affected by smoking are of special concern to adults over 50.

1. **Lower your blood pressure.** *Blood pressure drops in less than a half hour after your last cigarette.* You may be able to avoid taking medications and risking their side effects.

2. **Recover faster.** Speaking of medication, you're likely to be taking more prescriptions in your later years, experiencing more illnesses, and undergoing more procedures. Not smoking speeds up natural healing.
3. **Stay sharp.** Many studies have found that smoking increases your risk for Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. Hold onto your memory and cognitive functions longer.

4. **Breathe easier.** Seniors have higher rates of respiratory conditions so it pays to take care of your lungs. In addition to lung cancer, you’ll be protecting yourself from pneumonia, COPD, bronchitis, and emphysema.

5. **Strengthen your heart.** Enhanced circulation and fewer heart conditions are another bonus. *Your risk of heart attacks declines in just a few weeks after you quit smoking.*

6. **Thicken your bones.** Smoking speeds up bone loss that comes with aging. Guarding against fractures makes it easier to stay active and fit.

**Tips for Seniors Who Want to Quit Smoking**

Many smoking cessation tips that work for the younger set will help seniors too. Take a look at some general tips, and advice geared toward your particular needs and experiences.

1. **Try nicotine replacement.** *Studies show that seniors tend to underestimate the safety of nicotine replacement devices.* Talk with your doctor about gum and patches. Quitting may be less uncomfortable than you think.

2. **Check your coverage.** In recent years, Medicare coverage for smoking cessation has expanded. You may be eligible for counseling and pharmaceuticals even if you don’t already have a diagnosed smoking-related condition.
3. **Taper down.** Years ago, you may have heard that cold turkey was the only way to quit. Today, most experts agree that ex-smokers succeed with a variety of methods, including gradual approaches.

4. **Apply your wisdom.** There are advantages to not being born yesterday. Build your confidence by remembering other obstacles you've overcome. Focus on your future goals.

5. **Seek support.** One major piece of wisdom that often comes with maturity is the recognition that we sometimes need a helping hand. Let your family and friends know how they can assist you. Join a support group or start one of your own.

6. **Think long term.** Many smokers require multiple attempts at quitting, so hang in there. *Each time you try, you learn more about what works for you.* Just wanting to quit puts you ahead of the pack. According to the CDC, older smokers try to quit at only half the rate of younger adults. You can become an inspiring role model for others.

Becoming smoke-free is a major victory whether you're 18 or 80. Giving up tobacco can extend your life and help you get more enjoyment from your golden years.