

Long-Term Effects of Smoking Cessation Treatments on Mental Health

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1. Introduction

1.1. Smoking Cessation: Health Benefits and Mental Health Challenges

According to the American Lung Association, smoking is one of the biggest causes of preventable illness and death, leading to lung cancer, heart disease, and breathing problems [1]. Quitting smoking has major health benefits, but it can also affect mental health, causing stress, mood swings, and feelings of sadness, especially for people who already struggle with anxiety or depression. There are different ways to help people quit, such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), varenicline, and bupropion, which help reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms. However, their long-term effects on mental health are still unclear. Therapies like counseling (CBT) and mindfulness techniques can also help people stay smoke-free, but their success depends on the person's willingness to stick with them. Since quitting smoking can be tough on mental health, a mix of medication and therapy tailored to each person is the best way to help people quit for good [1]. This paper examines the long-term impact of different smoking cessation treatments on mental health, including pharmacological therapies, behavioral interventions, and combination approaches. It evaluates evidence on both beneficial and adverse mental health outcomes after quitting, considering factors such as pre-existing mental health conditions, the level of nicotine dependence, and the specific treatment methods used.

1.2. Quitting Smoking: A Path to Better Health and Longevity

Quitting smoking offers immediate and long-term health benefits, regardless of age or smoking history. It reduces the risk of serious conditions like heart disease, stroke, and cancer while improving lung function and overall well-being. Cardiovascular health improves as quitting lowers inflammation, cholesterol issues, and artery damage. Lung function also benefits, reducing the risk of respiratory diseases like COPD and infections. The risk of cancer drops significantly, with the chances of developing lung, bladder, and throat cancer decreasing over time. Women who quit before or during pregnancy lower the risks of complications like low birth weight and premature birth, improving both maternal and infant

health [2]. The benefits of quitting begin within minutes, with heart rate and blood pressure stabilizing, lung function improving in months, and disease risks significantly decreasing over the years. After 15–20 years, the risk of heart disease and smoking-related cancers approaches that of a non-smoker. Quitting smoking is a life-changing decision, leading to better health, longevity, and financial savings. While challenging, the benefits far outweigh the difficulties, making it a crucial step toward a healthier future [2].

1.3. Understanding the Gastrointestinal Effects of Smoking Cessation and Their Management

Quitting smoking is good for long-term health, but it can temporarily upset the digestive system as the body adjusts to life without nicotine. Some common side effects include mouth ulcers from stress and nicotine withdrawal. Appetite may change—some people feel hungrier, while others eat less. Nausea can last for weeks. Stomach problems like cramps, bloating, indigestion, and irregular bowel movements are also common. Constipation happens because nicotine is used to help digestion, and without it, the process slows down. Some may have diarrhea as their gut bacteria adjust. These issues occur because nicotine affects digestion, stomach acid, and certain brain chemicals. Changes in gut bacteria also play a role. Stress from quitting and hormone shifts can make digestion worse and sometimes lead to weight gain.

To manage these effects, eating more fiber, drinking plenty of water, and having smaller meals can help. Exercise supports digestion and weight control. Medications like antacids or laxatives may help if symptoms persist. Stress relief activities like meditation, yoga, or deep breathing can also ease withdrawal discomfort. These side effects are temporary and improve as the body adapts. Although quitting can be tough, the long-term health benefits far outweigh the short-term struggles. Understanding these changes and using the right strategies can make quitting smoking easier and lead to a healthier life [3].

2. Conclusion

Quitting smoking is one of the best decisions a person can make for their overall well-being, significantly reducing the risk of serious diseases like cancer, heart disease, and lung conditions. However, while the physical benefits of smoking cessation are well-documented, the mental health challenges associated with quitting should not be overlooked. Many individuals experience anxiety, irritability, and mood swings during the withdrawal process, especially those with a history of mental health conditions. Various treatments, such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), prescription medications like varenicline and bupropion, and behavioral therapies, help manage these challenges. However, their long-term effects on mental health remain an area of continued research. Success in quitting often depends on individual motivation, the right combination of treatment methods, and ongoing support from healthcare professionals, family, and peers. Despite the temporary difficulties, the long-term mental and

physical health benefits of quitting far outweigh the struggles. A personalized approach that combines medication, counseling, and lifestyle adjustments is essential to making smoking cessation successful. Understanding and addressing the mental health effects of quitting will improve overall outcomes and help more individuals break free from tobacco addiction for good.

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