



**DART Prevention Coalition**  
Taking Aim at Substance Use in Ocean County

# Breathe Free: Taking Control of Lung Health



Your lungs support every step you take. What you choose to breathe in, shapes your health today and for years to come.

Lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer death for men and women, responsible for more deaths than breast, colon and prostate cancer combined. Although anyone can develop lung cancer, smoking and secondhand smoke remain the top risk factors. Other important risk factors to take into account are a family history of lung cancer, prior radiation to the chest area or exposure to pollutants or substances such as radon or asbestos.

## Know the Early Signs and Symptoms

- Persistent cough
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing up blood
- Unexplained fatigue or weight loss
- Hoarseness

If you are experiencing any of these signs of symptoms, talk to your healthcare provider about screenings. Early detection can save lives and make a world of difference for treatment and care.

**Quitting tobacco at any age lowers a person's risk and slows your lungs to begin healing almost immediately.**

## Oral Nicotine Pouches and Vaping

Although oral nicotine pouches, like Zyn, and vaping are marketed as smokeless, they still expose your body to harmful addictive chemicals that damage lung and oral tissues. Nicotine constricts blood vessels (which reduces oxygen flow and puts stress on your respiratory system), increases your heart rate and blood pressure and can cause irritation of airways and gums. Quitting oral nicotine pouches and vape products can improve lung function, circulation and energy levels in just weeks.

## Marijuana Use and Lung Health

Habitual marijuana use can cause symptoms such as persistent coughing, decreased lung capacity, inflammation and scarring in airways or chronic bronchitis. Regularly smoking marijuana can lower your lungs' defense against clearing out bacteria, fungi and pollutants putting you at a higher risk for infection. Additionally, long-term marijuana use has been associated with bullae, otherwise known as air pocket formation in the lungs, which in extreme cases can lead to a collapsed lung.

Whether you are considering or in the process of quitting or cutting back on nicotine, vaping or marijuana, know that your lungs can heal. Learning healthier habits can help make quitting easier.

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[rwjbh.org/DARTresources](http://rwjbh.org/DARTresources)

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## Lung Self-Care

- **Stay Active** - Take regular walks or bike rides to keep your lungs strong.
- **Practice Deep Breathing** - This can help expand and clear your lungs.
- **Eat Antioxidant Rich Food** - Foods such as berries, leafy greens and citrus can help protect against cell damage.
- **Avoid Secondhand Smoke** - When possible, avoid being exposed to smoke around you.
- **Schedule Checkups and Screenings** - Preventative care can save lives.

## Put Your Best Lung Forward: Strategies to Quit Smoking and Get Your Lungs Feeling Their Best

- **Recognize triggers and have a plan in place to handle them.** The better prepared you are, the better off you will be.
- **Practice deep breathing and grounding exercises.** Find a podcast to help you with this!
- **Talk about your goals with family, friends and coworkers.** Accountability can help keep you on track!
- **Find a support network.** Whether this is an in-person group or online, find people who can support you reaching whatever goals you set for yourself.
- **Delay urges for 5-10 minutes.** Cravings tend to pass more quickly than we think and getting past this 5-10 minute mark could help minimize usage and make the transition to quitting easier.
- **Keep gum, stress balls or other fidgets handy to keep you distracted during urges.**
- **Stay busy!**

## Quitting Smoking or Vaping is Easier with Support

Quitting smoking is not easy; celebrate your small victories. Your lungs are resilient and every health choice helps fuel that resiliency.

Remember, you don't have to quit alone. Our certified Tobacco Treatment Specialists are here to help. Through our free 8-week program, you'll receive support from one of our specialists, nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) and have access to peer support.

Learn more or request an appointment at [rwjbh.org/quitcenter](https://rwjbh.org/quitcenter).

