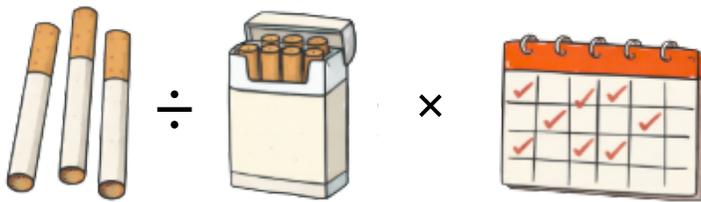# Understanding smoking history.

? **What are smoking pack years?**
Smoking pack years quantify a person's lifetime exposure to cigarette smoking.

Calculating smoking pack years

(Cigarettes per day ÷ 20) **×** **Years Smoked**

Most packs contain 20 cigarettes.
Confirm the number of cigarettes per pack with the patient.

Example
An individual smokes 2 packs per day for 15 years

(40 ÷ 20) x 15 = 30

This person has a 30 pack year smoking history

Clinical tips

▶ **Segment Changes:** If smoking behaviour changed over time (e.g. quit periods), break it into 'segments' of different smoking behaviours, calculate the pack years for each segment, and sum them.

▶ **Other Tobacco:** Cigar, pipe, and smokeless tobacco ≠ convert cleanly to pack years. Use your clinical judgement.

▶ **Quit Date Matters:** Ask for a quit date or years since quitting.

▶ **Shared Decision Making (SDM):** Use SDM conversations to facilitate smoking pack year history.

Tools

NYC Health + Hospitals Calculator
- Includes other tobacco types
- Supports complex histories

iCanQuit Calculator (NSW Health)
- Incorporates number of cigarettes per pack

PRAXUS HEALTH

lung health™ foundation

Supporting conversations about smoking history.

Creating a safe space for patients

When discussing smoking history, it's important to approach the conversation as a collaborative process built on trust and respect. Using open-ended questions, reflective listening, and affirmation helps people feel heard and supported.

An empathetic, non-judgemental approach creates a safe space for honest dialogue and more meaningful, person-centred conversations.

Conversation prompts

- "Would it be okay if we talked about your smoking history? It helps me understand your health."
- "Tell me about your smoking, when did you start?"
- "How many years have/did you smoke?"
- "How many cigarettes per day on average?"
- "Do you currently smoke? Have you had any cigarettes in the past 6 months?"

Cessation

- "Have you ever tried to quit or cut down? When was this? What was that experience like?"
- "If you ever decided to quit, what might motivate you to do that again?"
- "On a scale from 0–10, how ready would you say you are to make a change?"
- "What would need to happen to move you up one point?"
- "Would you be interested in hearing what smoking cessation options are available if you did decide to quit one day?"

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