The cessation methods Canadian smokers use in their quit attempts

Results from the Canadian Community Health Survey

The Canadian Community Health Survey is Statistics Canada's largest national survey collecting information related to health status. The survey began in 2001 and has been conducted annually since 2007. In 2023 and 2024 the survey was restricted to individuals 18 years of age or over. The number of respondents in each of those years was 51,600 and 48,300, respectively.

Statistics Canada publishes tables with some results from this survey on its web-site, and makes the data dictionaries for Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) available to the public on request.

The survey estimates that there were 3.56 million Canadian smokers over 18 years of age in 2023 and 3.61 million in 2024. Among these, 1.8 million smokers had made a quit attempt in the 12 months before being interviewed in 2023 (51%) and 1.9 million smokers had done so in 2024 (54%). As evidenced by the fact that they identified themselves as smokers at the time of the survey, these attempts were unsuccessful. Among people who identified themselves as having smoked in the past, there were 429,500 who said in 2023 they had quit in the past 12 months in 2024 and 414,500 who responded in this way in 2024.

Smokers who had tried to quit in the past 12 months and former smokers who had quit in the past 12 months were asked about the stop smoking methods they had used. Eight potential quitting methods were identified in 2023. These were: (a) nicotine replacement products, (b) smoking cessation medications, (c) internet-based programs or apps, (d) vaping devices or e-cigarettes, (e) making a deal with a friend or your family, (f) reducing the number of cigarettes, (g) trying to quit smoking on your own, or (h) an 'other' method. In 2024 an additional method was included – (i) the use of tobacco-free nicotine pouches. People could identify the use of more than one method.

During these two survey years, the most commonly cited method was non-pharmacological self-help: Two-thirds of quitters (63%) and would-be quitters said they 'tried to quit smoking on their own'. Almost one-half used the self-management tool of reducing the number of cigarettes they smoked (45%). One-in-ten (9%) made a deal with a friend or family and fewer one-in-thirty (3%) used an internet program or an app.

The most commonly used smoking-cessation products reported used were nicotine replacement products (used by 30% of respondents) and vaping products (used by 27%). Fewer than one-in-ten said they used stop smoking medications (8%) and only slightly more than one-in-twenty (6%) said they used nicotine pouches. Almost one-tenth of attempts (9%) were made with an "other" method not specified in the questionnaire.

This survey is not designed to assess whether a quit attempt has been successful, and the results cannot be converted into a measure of quitting success. The CCHS relies on self-reported behaviour data, and does not confirm responses with physical or biological tests. There is no ability to test for 3-month or 6-month abstinence: those who are identified as recently-quit former smokers would include individuals who had their last cigarette only a few days ago and those for whom up to a year had passed.

The survey can, however, assess whether quit attempts have been unsuccessful. Those who report smoking and who also report having tried to quit have more obviously failed in their quit attempt (even though they may have succeeded for a length of time during the past year).

Seven in eight respondents (85%) failed in their quit attempts and were identified as current smokers during their interviews. The method associated with the greatest failure rate (92%) was the use of nicotine pouches. The method associated with the lowest failure rate (79%) was stop smoking medications. Those who tried to quit on their own had about the same failure rate as those who used vaping products or NRT (86%-87%). Access to the Master File or PUMF file is needed to establish whether these differences are statistically significant and how the use of more than one quit method affects the outcome of an attempt.

The results for each survey year are shown in Table 1. Figures 1 to 3 shows the average results for the two-years for which data is available (results for nicotine pouches were available for 2024 only, and are not averaged).

Figure 1: Average annual number of Canadian smokers and recent-quitters using stop smoking methods
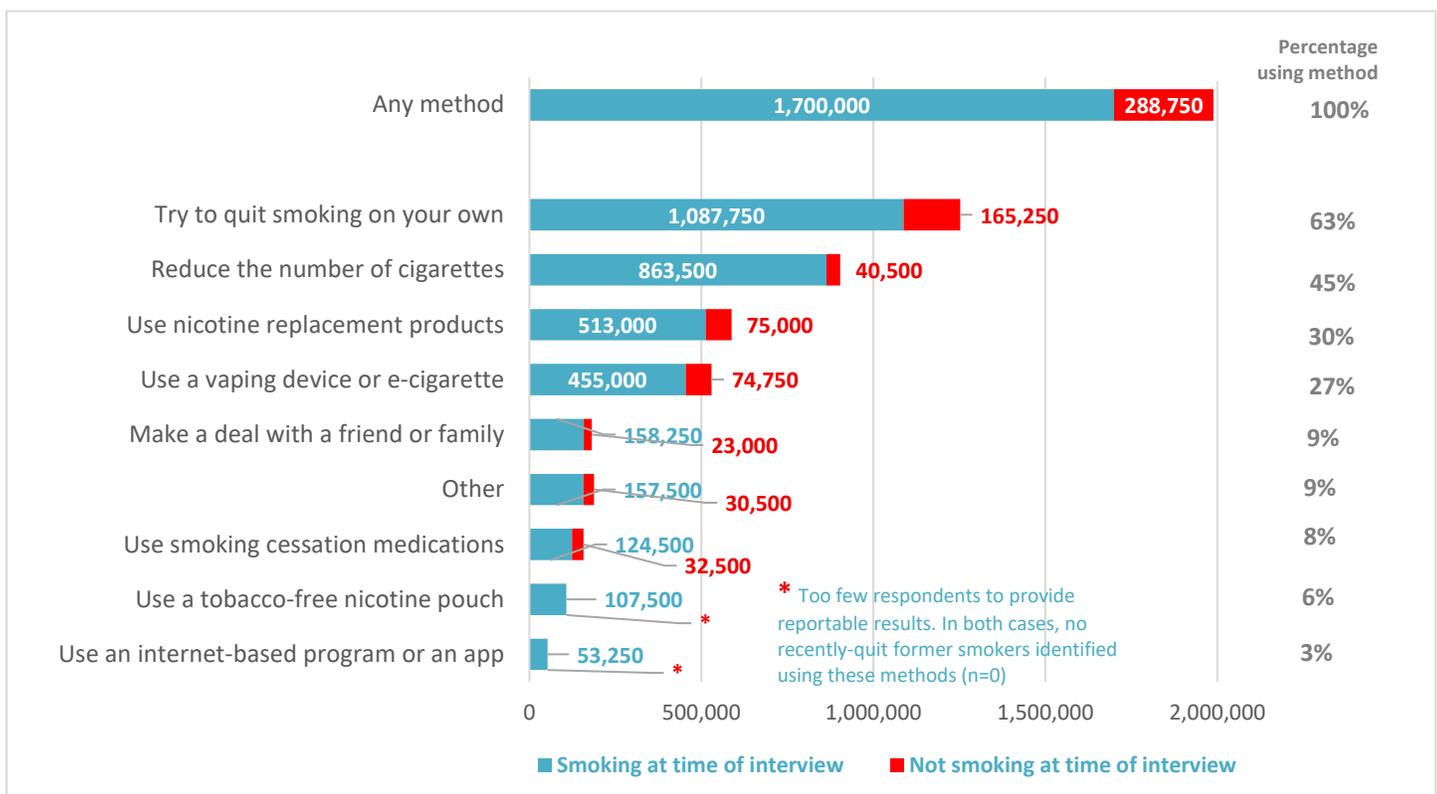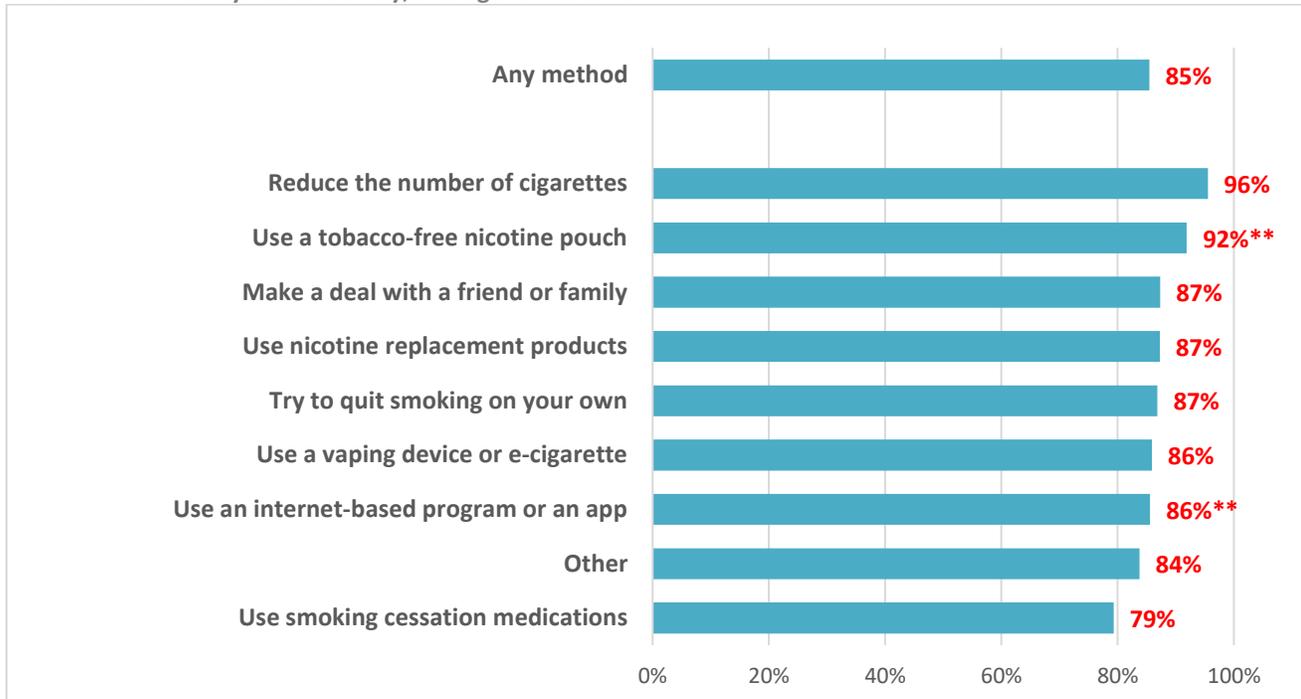Canadian Community Health Survey 2023-2024

Figure 2: Failure rate* of past-year quit attempts (respondent still smoking at time of interview)

Canadian Community Health Survey, average for 2023-2024

Method	Failure rate
Any method	85%
Reduce the number of cigarettes	96%
Use a tobacco-free nicotine pouch	92%**
Make a deal with a friend or family	87%
Use nicotine replacement products	87%
Try to quit smoking on your own	87%
Use a vaping device or e-cigarette	86%
Use an internet-based program or an app	86%**
Other	84%
Use smoking cessation medications	79%

*Failure rate is the proportion of smokers who have made a quit attempt in the past 12 months who identified themselves as still smoking at the time of their interview.
** No recently quit former smokers identified as having used tobacco-free nicotine pouches or internet programs or apps. The failure rate reflects Statistics Canada's estimate of the weighted frequency of this "zero" response.

Figure 3: Percentage of past-year quit attempts per method used.

Canadian Community Health Survey, average for 2023-2024 (except for nicotine pouch, where value for 2024 is shown)
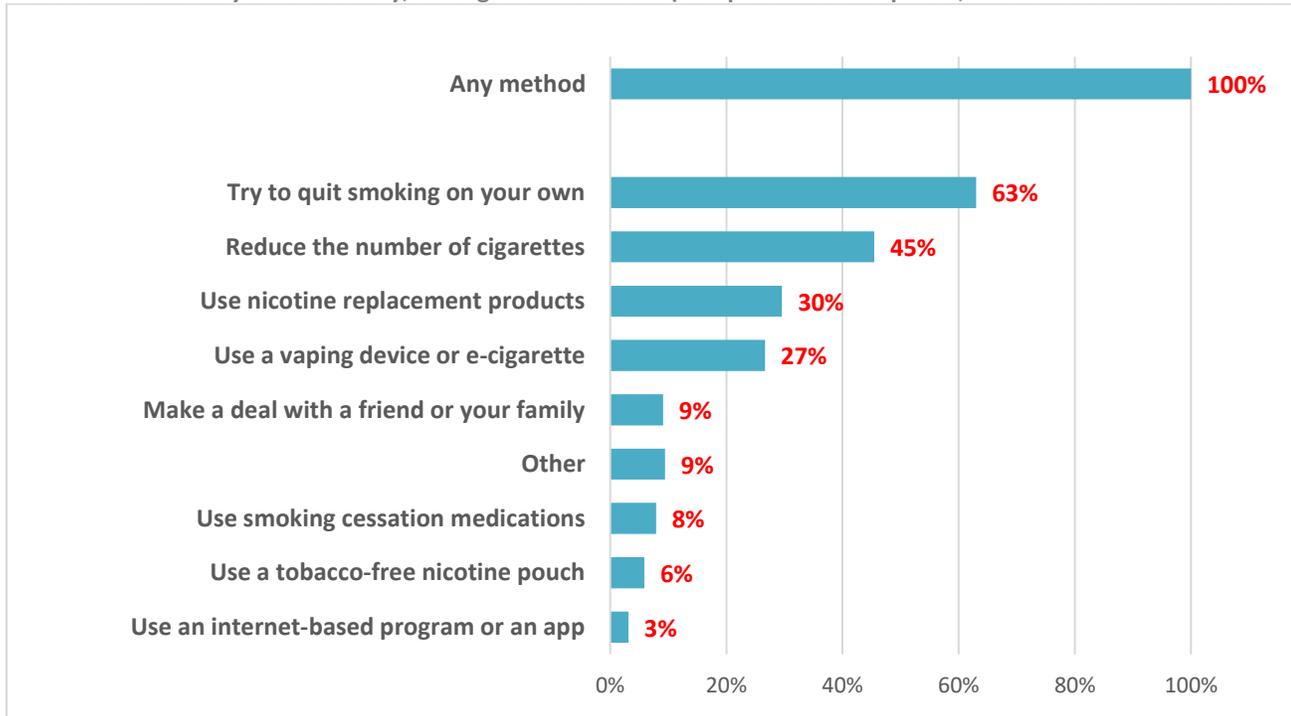
Method	Percentage
Any method	100%
Try to quit smoking on your own	63%
Reduce the number of cigarettes	45%
Use nicotine replacement products	30%
Use a vaping device or e-cigarette	27%
Make a deal with a friend or your family	9%
Other	9%
Use smoking cessation medications	8%
Use a tobacco-free nicotine pouch	6%
Use an internet-based program or an app	3%

Table 1A: Canadian Community Health Survey, 2023 & 2024. "Help to quit smoking"

Cessation method and associated CCHS variable name.	Survey Year	Number of smokers who tried to quit	Number who Relapsed	Number not smoking at time of interview	Failure rate	% using method
		A	B	C	=B/A	
Total Smokers attempting to quit or quitting in past 12 months (CSS_41 and SPU_10/SPU_25)	**2023**	**1,935,000**	**1,632,000**	**302,000**	**84%**	**100%**
	2024	**2,042,500**	**1,767,000**	**275,500**	**87%**	**100%**
Try to quit smoking on my own (SPU_40G; SPU_45G)	2023	1,220,500	1,044,500	176,000	86%	64%
	2024	1,285,500	1,131,000	154,500	88%	64%
Reduce the number of cigarettes (SPU_40F, SPU_45F)	2023	888,500	854,500	34,000	96%	52%
	2024	919,500	872,500	47,000	95%	49%
Use nicotine replacement products – (SPU_40A, SPU_45A)	2023	560,500	480,500	80,000	86%	29%
	2024	615,500	545,500	70,000	89%	31%
Use vaping device or e-cigarette – (SPU_40D, SPU_45D)	2023	556,500	465,500	91,000	84%	29%
	2024	503,000	444,500	58,500	88%	25%
Make a deal with a friend or your family – (SPU_40E, SPU_45E)	2023	178,000	158,000	20,000	89%	10%
	2024	503,000	158,500	26,000	86%	9%
Use other method – (SPU_40H, SPU_45H)	2023	174,000	143,000	31,000	82%	9%
	2024	202,000	172,000	30,000	85%	10%
Use smoking cessation medications (SPU_40B, SPU_45B)	2023	151,500	127,000	24,500	84%	8%
	2024	162,500	122,000	40,500	75%	7%
Use a tobacco-free nicotine pouch – (SPU_40I, SPU_45I)	2024	117,000	107,500	9,500	92%	6%
Use an internet-based program or an app (SPU_40C, SPU_45C)	2024	56,500	46,500	*	82%	3%
	2023	68,000	60,000	*	88%	3%

"*" indicates that the number of respondents was too few to provide reportable results. In both these categories, not a single recently-quit smoker identified as having used these methods

Variables used

Year	Variable	
2023	SPU_40	**Question:** During the past 12 months, did you do any of the following to help you quit smoking?.... A. Nicotine replacement products; B. Smoking-cessation medications, C. Internet-based program, D. Use a vaping device or e-cigarette, E. Deal with a friend/family, F. Reduce number of cigarettes, G. Try to quit smoking on your own, H. Other, I. Tobacco-free nicotine pouch **Universe 2023**: Respondents who answered CSS_41 = 1 AND (CSS_20 = 1 OR CSS_20 = (2, 3) OR ((CSS_20 = 4 and CSS_15 = 1 AND SPU_05 = 1) OR (CSS_20 = 4 and CSS_15 = 1 and SPU_05 = (2, NR) and SPU_10 = 1))) • **In 2023, asked of:** People who stopped smoking for at least 24 hours in the past year because they were trying to quit or cut back AND (have smoked daily in the past 30 days OR have smoked at least once in the last month OR have not smoked in the last month but have smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetime and once smoked daily OR have smoked 100 cigarettes in their lifetime but were never daily smokers but stopped smoking occasionally less than one year ago) **Universe 2024:** Respondents who answered CSS_41 = 1 • **In 2024, asked of:** People who stopped smoking for at least 24 hours in the past year because they were trying to quit or cut back and who had smoked at least once in the last month.
2023, 2024	SPU_45	**Question:** During the past 12 months, did you do any of the following to help you quit smoking?.... A. Nicotine replacement products; B. Smoking-cessation medications, C. Internet-based program, D. Use a vaping device or e-cigarette, E. Deal with a friend/family, F. Reduce number of cigarettes, G. Try to quit smoking on your own, H. Other, I. Tobacco-free nicotine pouch **Universe 2023 and 2024:** Respondents who answered (SPU_Q10 = 1 OR (SPU_Q25 = 1 and SPU_Q30 = 1) or SPU_Q35 = 1) • **In 2023 and 2024 asked of:** People who stopped smoking occasionally in the past year OR are stopped smoking daily and completely in the past year OR were once daily smokers and quit smoking completely in the past year
2023,2024	CSS_41	**Question:** In the past 12 months, did you stop smoking for at least 24 hours because you were trying to cut back or quit? **Universe 2023 and 2024:** Respondents who answered CSS_20 = (1, 2, 3) • **In 2023 and 2024 asked of:** People who had smoked at least once in the past month.
2023,2024	SPU_10	**Question:** When did you stop smoking? (former occasional smoker) **Universe 2023 and 2024:** Respondents who answered SPU_05 = 2 and (CSS_20 = 4 and CSS_15 = 1) • **In 2023 and 2024 asked of:** People who had never smoked daily and who had not smoked in the past month but had smoked more than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime
2023,2024	SPU_25	**Question:** When did you stop smoking? (former daily smoker) **Universe 2023 and 2024:** Respondents who answered CSS_20 <> 1 and SPU_05 = 1 • **In 2023 and 2024 asked of:** People who had once smoked daily but who no longer do so.