

Fighting the urge: Tips for kicking the smoking habit

By Natalie McGill

You can have many reasons to want to quit smoking, from wanting to be able to climb a flight of stairs with ease to hoping to live long enough to see your grandchildren grow up.

Whatever your reason for wanting to quit, the road to healthy living will not be easy. But the rewards far outweigh the effects of taking in another drag.

About 443,000 people in the U.S. die annually from the effects of smoking and about 8 million people are sickened by related chronic illness such as heart disease, says Thomas Glynn, PhD, MS, MA, director of cancer science and trends at the American Cancer Society. A person who smokes one pack of cigarettes a day for 30 years or more will take 10 years off of her or his life and increase risks for 15 types of cancers, such as cancers of the lung and throat.

Glynn said that about 52 percent of smokers, or 22 million people, make a "serious quit attempt," which is defined as lasting 24 hours or longer.

"Only about 3 million of them will be successful, which is why we need to get more information in people's hands about why people need to quit," he says.

But where do you start? Glynn says scientific data on quitting shows that motivation is key to putting the pack away for good.

Glynn said he makes smokers write down what their reasons are for quitting. Is the cost



>> For more tips on quitting smoking, visit <http://betobaccofree.hhs.gov>

of a pack draining your wallet? Do you want to get more physically fit?

"They should write it down and keep it with them so when they're tested they can look at them," Glynn says.

Setting goals a step to success

Your next step is setting goals and establishing a support network. Set dates on your calendar for when you're ready to quit. Inform your doctors and your pharmacist about your quest to be smoke-free and seek their guidance, Glynn says. And do not tempt yourself. Until you break the cycle, you should think twice about socializing with friends who smoke. And throw any cigarettes or related items such as ashtrays or lighters in the garbage, Glynn says.

It is also important to let your family know up front that you are trying to quit. Glynn says science shows you are more likely to follow through on a commitment you make in public.

"You also need to let them know because you need that support to keep you on the straight and narrow, but you're also going to be nasty and cranky and you don't want them to hold that against you," Glynn says.

Your next step is respecting the process. You may start out excited about wanting to quit, but you may also experience a setback. It can take you as many as six times before you successfully quit, which speaks to the

power of nicotine, Glynn says.

"If someone has a quit date and they slip back that's not a failure," Glynn says. "They need to analyze where they slipped. Were they around the friends who smoked?"

The effects on your body after quitting are almost immediate, Glynn says. Your blood pressure and resting heartbeat will go down. Even climbing a flight of steps will start to feel a little easier after a week or 10 days.

In the long term, the risk for lung cancer may be close to that of a nonsmoker 10 to 15 years after quitting, Glynn says. And one thing to keep in mind for quitters: Expect to cough more than you did when you smoked. That's because your lungs are clearing out all the chemicals that collected in them when you smoked every day.

"It's a sign your lungs are healing," he says.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 44 million Americans smoked regularly in 2010, but 69 percent said they wanted to stomp out their habit for good.

"For anyone out there trying to quit, it says they're not alone," Glynn says.

Tools to help you lose your lighter

You may have seen television commercials telling you to use a patch or a lozenge to calm your nicotine cravings. But just how effective are these in getting you to stop smoking?

Glynn says Food and Drug Administration-approved aids, such as patches, chewing gum, nicotine inhalers and lozenges, are equally effective in helping smokers wean off nicotine. Such tools give you lower doses of nicotine over time and can double your success rate.

Prescription medications are also another option. Your doctor can tell you which options are best for you.



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