

Want to quit smoking? **You're not alone!**

If you are a smoker you have probably heard all of this before. Concerned family members and/or friends have probably inundated you with their feelings on the subject.

The fact of the matter is that two thousand teens start smoking every day. Yes, 2,000. So, with that in mind, let me cite a few startling statistics.

Cigarette smoking remains the leading cause of death and illness among Americans. Every year, roughly 430,000 Americans die from illnesses caused by tobacco use, accounting for one-fifth of all deaths. Tobacco use costs the nation about \$100 billion each year in direct medical expense and lost productivity.

About 25 percent of all American adults, or 46.3 million people, smoke. This number has remained constant for several years despite government efforts through Healthy People 2000 and Healthy People 2010 to lower those percentages. Slightly more men (28.1%) smoke than women (23.5%). Hispanics (20.4%) smoke less than whites (25.3%) or African Americans (26.7%)

Nevertheless, significant progress has been made since 1964, when the Surgeon General issued the first report outlining the health dangers of smoking. Since that time, the prevalence of smoking has dropped from 42.4% among adults to 25%.

In the U.S., cigarette smoking causes 445 new cases of lung cancer every day. Cigarette smoke contains 11 compounds that are known to cause cancer. Some of those compounds are benzene, carbon monoxide, arsenic, hydrogen cyanide, and polonium 210. Both lung cancer and emphysema would become quite rare if people would stop smoking.

Compared to a non-smoker, a smoker faces these risks:

- Fourteen times greater risk for dying from cancer of the lung, throat or mouth.
- Four times greater risk of dying from cancer of the esophagus.
- Two times greater risk of dying from a heart attack.
- Two times greater risk of dying from cancer of the bladder.

Use of other tobacco products, such as pipes, cigars, and snuff is less common, comprising less than 10% of use of all tobacco products. But the health effects of these products are similar to those of tobacco, particularly their association with cancers of the mouth, throat and esophagus.

Seventy percent of smokers want to quit. Only about five percent actually succeed every year. It is a tough thing to do. You have to be ready to stop. However, there is help out there. Classes and support groups are available. We (health professionals) can help, too.

First you have to determine the method that is right for you. The five most common methods of quitting are:

- Cold turkey (set a date and throw the cancer sticks away)
- Tapering off (smoke one less cigarette a day until you are down to zero)
- The nicotine patch (it delivers nicotine to you through your skin, but you will still need to retrain your hands, mouth and mind).

- Nicotine gum (perfect for smokeless tobacco users).
- Zyban or Wellbutrin (start taking them about a week before you want to quit in order for the medicine to kick in).

Next, you need to choose a date that you are going to quit. Select a date that is not too stressful (your wedding day is probably not good timing). Finally, get support. Quit by using group support. Or, quit by getting support from a friend or coworker who can be understanding and objective—perhaps someone who has recently quit and knows what you are going through.

Admittedly, quitting is not easy. Every time you want to reach for a cigarette, stop, sit down, take a few deep breaths and think about the advantages of quitting. To help, I'll name a few:

- In the first 20 minutes after quitting, your blood pressure and pulse will drop to normal and the damage to your cardiovascular system will begin to subside.
- After eight hours, the carbon monoxide levels in your blood decrease and the oxygen levels begin to increase.
- After twenty-four hours, your chances of a heart attack begin to decrease and the oxygen levels return to normal.
- After one year, your risk of heart disease is cut in half.
- After five years, your risk of a stroke is equal to that of a non-smoker.
- After ten years, your risk of lung cancer is cut in half.
- Finally, after fifteen years, an ex-smoker's risk of heart disease is about equal to that of someone who has never smoked.

You will also save money. At the current rate of about \$4.00/pack for cigarettes, a one-pack-a-day smoker will save about \$120.00/month, \$1,460.00/year, and almost \$15,000.00 in ten years.

If you think you are ready, but you need a little help or a little more information, you can call St. Thomas More Hospital's Smoking Cessation Program at 285-2010.

It's a new year. Stop smoking. You'll be glad you did!!