

Health

December 31, 2006

Quit smoking: Give yourself the gift of health

As we enter a new year, our thoughts turn to making resolutions and changes in our lives that will, hopefully, bring us more peace, health, love and joy. This year, consider adding a resolution: finally let go of a habit that is physically and financially destructive. Celebrate the miracle of being free of an addiction that controls your life. Honor the strength and courage within yourself to create change in your life, and be a role model for the children you love.

The damage caused by cigarettes has been publicized in every newspaper, magazine and many TV shows and commercials. We know that smoking damages nearly every organ in the human body and is linked to at least 10 different cancers, accounting for some 30 percent of all cancer deaths. It is one of the best known behavior risk factors for heart disease. Yet, according to the American Cancer Society, one in four Americans continue to light up. Therefore, the question is not “why should you stop smoking?” but “how do you do it?” Decide today to take advantage of the American Cancer Society's resources. Go to the Web site www.cancer.org, and click on “Guide to Quitting Smoking”. The guide will provide information related to why to quit, the benefits of quitting, where and how to find help, the pros and cons of each method available, how to deal with withdrawal and resources.

Here is a plan that you can use to help you start the journey:

1. Select a specific day to quit within the next month. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to quit. Quitting tobacco takes a strong commitment over a long period of time.
2. Write down your reasons for wanting to quit. Keep the list with you for extra motivation.
3. Tell friends and family about your Quit Day to let them know what you are planning.
4. Get rid of all the cigarettes and ash trays in your home, car and place of work.
5. Stock up on oral substitutes - sugarless gum, crunchy/hard vegetables and/or hard candy.

6. Decide on a plan. Some options include: using the nicotine patch or gum, joining a tobacco cessation class, going to Nicotine Anonymous meetings, using self-help materials such as books and pamphlets, Emotional Freedom Therapy, acupuncture, low level laser treatments on the ear and hypnosis.
7. Practice refusing cigarettes being pushed at you by saying, "No thank you, I don't smoke."
8. Set up a support system of people willing to help you through the process.
9. Analyze your past attempts to quit to find what worked and what did not work for you.
10. Avoid temptation; stay away from people and places that might tempt you to smoke.
11. Alter your habits; switch to juice or water instead of coffee or alcohol, take a different route to work, take a brisk walk instead of a coffee break.
12. Exercise, exercise, exercise to reduce stress, keep you busy, reduce withdrawal symptoms and help maintain your weight.
13. Delay your urges to light up. Tell yourself you have to wait at least 10 minutes. Ride out the desire, it will go away.
14. Remind yourself that there is no such thing as just one cigarette - or even one puff.

If you are helping someone else stop smoking, these are ways you can help them be successful:

a) respect that they are in charge; b) ask them if they want you to call or visit regularly to see how they're doing; c) spend time doing things with them to keep their mind off smoking; d) help them with a few chores to help lighten the stress of quitting; e) celebrate along the way; e) don't take their grumpiness personally; f) don't offer advice.

This year do something nice for yourself and your body. Thousands of people have stopped smoking and have been rewarded with healthy looking skin, the ability to breathe better and to smell and taste foods clearly, reduced risk of stroke/heart attack/cancer/emphysema, a healthy mouth and gums and extra money to spend. Give yourself the best gift of all this year - GOOD HEALTH.