

Helping others quit smoking

It's difficult to watch someone you care about smoke their life away. However, smokers need to make the decision to quit because they realise it will benefit them, not because someone else wants them to. They might stop smoking for your sake, but they are unlikely to stay stopped unless they're doing it for themselves.

This doesn't mean you can't help. You can influence a smoker and can assist them to make the decision to quit, and you can provide support and encouragement once they have stopped smoking.

THE FACTS AND GOOD NEWS

Most people know the bad news about smoking: that it leads to cancer, heart disease, emphysema, reduced circulation (sometimes resulting in gangrene and amputation), lowered fertility, problems with pregnancy, and premature ageing. But many people don't think about the good news about quitting.

Much of the damage caused by smoking is reversible, and the earlier a person quits, the more chance their body has to repair itself. The longer they stay stopped, the greater their chance of avoiding a smoking-related disease.

As soon as a person stops smoking, their body begins to recover:

- After twelve hours almost all of the nicotine is out of their system.
- After twenty-four hours the level of carbon monoxide in their blood has dropped dramatically. They now have more oxygen in their bloodstream.

- After five days most nicotine by-products have gone.
- Within days their sense of taste and smell improves.
- Within a month their blood pressure returns to its normal level and more air is getting into their lungs.
- Within three months the blood flow to their hands and feet improves, and their lungs will be working better.
- After twelve months their increased risk of dying from heart disease is half that of a continuing smoker.

People who give up smoking often get the confidence to take on other challenges and break other damaging habits.

Quitting smoking saves money that can be spent on other things.

The great majority of smokers want to give up smoking. The challenge is actually doing it!

HELPING A SMOKER DECIDE TO QUIT

Your friend or family member could benefit from your help if they are to become a nonsmoker. But you have to offer real assistance, rather than nagging, preaching, smugness or criticism. You'll be much more helpful if you follow some of these tips.

IF YOU ARE AN EX-SMOKER, REMEMBER THAT

- The reasons people have for smoking and the things that trigger their smoking differ from smoker to smoker
- What helped you to quit may not necessarily work for everyone
- It will help to encourage the smoker to try a range of things until they find what is best for them.

IF YOU ARE A SMOKER

- Consider the influence you may have if you do not make changes to your own smoking. Are you willing to either cut down or not smoke in front of them? Think about what you would like your friends or family to do if you were trying to quit.

IF YOU HAVE NEVER SMOKED

- Learn about addiction to smoking, and understand that quitting can be very difficult, especially in the early days
- Understand that smokers often feel in conflict about their smoking; they want to stop, but part of them wants to keep smoking
- You can help to show your friend a better way. How do you deal with your stress and boredom, as well as enjoy happy times, without smoking? Does your lifestyle provide an image of a nonsmoker that would appeal to your smoking friend?

DON'T BECOME INVOLVED IN ARGUMENTS ABOUT SMOKING

- Chances are that, underneath the bravado, the smoker knows as well as you do that smoking is bad for their health and is becoming less acceptable around others in public places. Disagreements only make smokers more defensive and more likely to insist on their right to keep on smoking.

SHOW THAT YOU CARE

- Nagging achieves little and often results in both parties feeling angry. Express your opinion clearly and simply, in a way that shows that you care: don't just carry on about what they should be doing.

Let your friend know – tactfully – that there are self-help materials and organisations that can give support to people trying to quit.

- One way to do this is to find someone who has used these methods to help them quit, and introduce them to your friend. Let them know – if they ask, or are talking about how they should give up smoking – that they can call the Quitline on 13 7848 (13 QUIT) for advice, information or a free Quit Pack.

HELPING THEM SUCCEED

Whether a smoker succeeds in quitting has a lot to do with how people around them react to the decision, and to their continuing efforts to stay quit. Some people, consciously or subconsciously, only undermine the person's plan to become a nonsmoker. If you want to make sure you're helping, not hindering, follow these tips.

PROVIDE SUPPORT, UNDERSTANDING AND ENCOURAGEMENT – EVEN IF YOUR QUITTING FRIEND SLIPS UP

Sometimes smokers slip up and smoke a couple of cigarettes, even though they are trying to quit. There are many reasons why this happens. The smoker may not have fully prepared for a particular situation, they might have decided it's OK to have 'just one', or they may have difficulty thinking of themselves as a nonsmoker. If your friend slips up, encourage him or her to put it behind them and focus again on the reasons why they want to quit. If your friend goes back to full-time smoking, encourage them to view their attempt not as a failure but as a step in the right direction. Most smokers make several attempts before they are able to stop completely. The more times a person tries to quit, the more likely they are to eventually succeed, as every attempt can make it easier for them to stop next time around. Criticism, on the other hand, is counterproductive: it just makes the smoker fearful of being judged and less likely to try again.

HELP YOUR FRIEND TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH QUITTING STRATEGIES HE OR SHE HAS PLANNED.

What sort of support do you think your friend wants you to provide? Perhaps you can support the smoker when they go out. If they have decided to avoid tempting situations, such as pubs or parties, suggest some alternative activities that you could enjoy together, such as going out to a restaurant, a play or a film. If they have decided to start exercising and need encouragement, offer to go along too.

BE AROUND

Sometimes, a person who's trying not to smoke just needs someone to talk to.

SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO QUIT

A person has a much better chance of staying a nonsmoker if they get support while quitting. Apart from this program, your friend can get support from a Quitline (if in Australia 13 7848 or 13 QUIT), or from a counsellor in your area.