Smoking: Be Tobacco Free

What is smoking, really?
Smoking is the inhalation of the smoke of burning tobacco encased in cigarettes, pipes, and cigars. It is a habit with serious health consequences. Smoking and the use of other tobacco products can cause or worsen numerous diseases and conditions and expose nearby people to toxic secondhand smoke. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, causing over 440,000 deaths per year among Americans 35 years of age and older, and 4.8 million deaths worldwide.

What’s so bad about smoking?
There is no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke. Any exposure, even an occasional cigarette or exposure to secondhand smoke, is harmful. It is not nicotine itself but the thousands of toxins present in tobacco smoke that are responsible for the majority of tobacco caused disease. Chemicals released by cigarettes include carbon monoxide, tar, cyanide, benzene, and formaldehyde. Yes, you are inhaling these chemicals into your lungs and releasing them into the air around you!

What about electronic cigarettes and smokeless tobacco?
These may also cause serious health problems because of the chemicals and toxins they contain. Because of the potential health risks, the FDA started regulating e cigarettes and smokeless tobacco like other tobacco products in 2016. Some smokeless tobacco contains greater amounts of nicotine - three to four times more - than cigarettes. These products also contain numerous substances that increase the risk of cancer of the mouth and throat, as well as gum disease and tooth decay. Many people may claim that these products are less harmful than smoking and can be effective in helping people stop smoking, but this is not an evidence based method to quit.

So how can I quit smoking?
Everyone is unique and different methods of quitting will appeal to different people. There are multiple methods to try. According to the most current research, the best way to quit is to combine a smoking cessation medication with a behavioral program. Discuss your options with your doctor, and try a few until you find what works best for you. Most withdrawal symptoms manifest within the first 1 to 2 days, peak within the first week and subside within 2 to 4 weeks.

Remember, it is not all about willpower.
Nicotine addiction can be very powerful, and even the strongest-willed quitters can relapse. That’s because when you quit smoking, you are likely to face two strong obstacles: craving and compulsion. Craving is a conscious drive that can be triggered by things in your environment - like your daily habits and routines. You
can control cravings. Compulsion, on the other hand, can be a forceful, unconscious drive to smoke, despite the fact that you know you shouldn’t. So, to really quit smoking, you may need more than sheer will power: You need to prepare yourself with tactics avoid your craving triggers and you need to be aware of the ways that nicotine can affect you both physically and psychologically.

Making a plan will significantly increase your chances of quitting successfully. Not having a plan can doom your efforts before you even start! Get off on the right foot by thinking ahead about potential obstacles and challenges you’ll face when you’re trying to quit - especially in those tricky early weeks. Your plan should include your pros and cons of quitting, a list of folks in your support system (family, friends, doctor, etc.), the rewards you’ll give yourself when you do well, and strategies to help you handle cravings and triggers. Many smokers relapse because they fail to plan.

Quick Tips for Quitting
- Set a quit date, ideally within two weeks.
- Remove tobacco products from your home, car, and workplace.
- Resolve not to smoke at all - not even one puff.
- Avoid drinking alcohol while you’re quitting. It can trigger cravings.
- Anticipate challenges, such as nicotine withdrawal, particularly during the critical first few weeks.
- Ask others not to smoke around you. Allowing them to smoke around you can make it harder to quit.
- Identify reasons for quitting and benefits of quitting.

Don’t be ashamed to use cessation medication and ask your doctor questions. You can quit even if you have failed before. Learn from what didn’t work last time and make a plan so this time you’ll be more successful. Most people find a combination of resources works best. More than 95% of those who try to quit relapse. Only 5% are able to quit without assistance. Many smokers need several tries to successfully quit. You are not alone. Just remember the benefits are well worth it. Keep trying.

Further Resources:
- NJ Jersey Quitline (NJ residents): 1-866-657-8677 or visit online at www.njquitonline.org.
- Mom’s Quit Connection: 1-856-665-6000  Mom’s Quit Connection is a free, face-to-face and telephonic smoking cessation program for pregnant women and women parenting children six years old and younger. MQC’s tobacco treatment specialists provide a personalized quit plan using motivational interviewing and behavior modification. There is no limit on the number of sessions and a client can join more than once. You can learn more on: www.tobaccofreenj.com or www.snjpc.org.