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Are you ready to accept the Great American Smokeout challenge?

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Categories: Impact, Netwellness

Every year, all current smokers are encouraged to quit smoking for one day on the third Thursday in November as part of the Great American Smokeout. If you've been thinking about quitting, this is the perfect time to take action. There are many support systems in place so you don't have to face this big challenge alone. The Smokeout helps smokers prove to themselves that they can go without smoking for 24 hours.

Currently, about 46 million adults smoke in the United States. Quitting tobacco use is hard and it may take several serious tries before you are successful. But keep in mind that half of all people who have ever smoked have quit. You can, too.

Plan to quit

Once you've decided that you're going to stop smoking, make a plan. Just as you would not start out on a road trip without a map, you need to have a plan ready for this important change in your life.

• Set a quit date.
• Make a list of your five most important reasons for quitting cigarettes.
• Identify those times when you think the urge to smoke may be very strong. Can you avoid some of those situations for a few weeks? If you can't, think of several things you can do instead of smoking at those times.
• Talk with your physician or health-care provider about ways to stay smoke-free.
• Find a friend or family member who will support and encourage you during this very important change.
• Reward yourself for small successes, such as 24 hours of not smoking, and then 1 week of not smoking.

Take the edge off with nicotine replacement

Nicotine replacement products are available that can help "take the edge off" of withdrawal symptoms when you quit smoking. Nicotine gum, nicotine lozenges, a patch applied to your skin, nasal sprays and nicotine inhalers replace some of the nicotine that you used to receive from cigarettes.

There isn't one form that is better than another and it all depends on what you prefer. Gum, lozenges and the patch are available over the counter in most states, while sprays and inhalers require a physician's prescription.

The patch may be the easiest to use because it is changed only once a day. The other forms of nicotine replacement require repeated uses throughout the day. About eight to 12 weeks of nicotine replacement is recommended. Talk with your health-care provider first, especially if you are taking other medications or have a serious health problem.
Stop cravings without nicotine

Another option is a smoking cessation medication such as varenicline (Chantix) or bupropion (Zyban). This kind of prescription comes in pill form and does not contain nicotine; however, it has been found to take away some of the desire for a cigarette.

Smoking cessation medications work by blocking the pleasant effects of nicotine on the brain. They are taken for one week BEFORE you quit smoking so that there is a good level of the medicine in your system when you do quit. At least seven to 12 weeks of medicine is usually recommended.

Get help for free

Free smoking cessation quitlines are an excellent resource and have been shown to double the quit rate. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW to improve your success during the Great American Smokeout and any time you need additional help or encouragement to stay on track.

Your local branch of the American Cancer Society may have specific events planned for the Great American Smokeout in your area. For example, hospitals recognize babies born on the day of the Smokeout with “I’m a born non-smoker” T-shirts.

The ultimate goal is to raise awareness and encourage smokers who are trying to end their nicotine dependence. Accept the Great American Smokeout Challenge.