

Dear friend, family, or acquaintance of a tobacco smoker/chewer,

I suspect you wish you could help a loved one with their addictions. I use the plural here, because almost all the time smokers are addicted to both the nicotine in the tobacco and to the habituation of lighting, handling, blowing smoke and taking a few seconds out of their day to do so.

What we do know is that nagging is not the best method. Neither is the reciting of all the bad things that will happen if they continue, because they are already aware of them. There are several approaches that can be used, provided the person shows some interest in quitting. They range from quitting “cold turkey” to spending a week in a hospital detoxification center. The success rates vary from 3% (cold turkey) to 52% (hospital program).

It has been determined that about 75% of smokers would really like to quit. Most non-smokers have no idea how intense the grip nicotine has on the person smoking. Nicotine is almost twice as addicting as heroin. When someone smokes, the nicotine triggers the release of dopamine in the brain, which is the source of the pleasurable feeling it gives. Unfortunately, this feeling goes away after a while and leaves the smoker with a low which causes a desire to light up another one. And so it goes.

The first thing I would suggest is encouraging the person you are concerned about to consult with either his or her primary care physician or a pulmonary specialist. They should be able to counsel the person and, if indicated, help them select the dose of plain nicotine (patch, gum, nasal spray, or lozenge) that is appropriate as they quit smoking.

Perhaps more important is the ability of a physician to prescribe a drug with a proven record of helping and the correct dose. This combination can result in a success rate of 20% or more. The success rate is even better if this treatment is combined with regular and frequent counseling sessions.

You may hear of other alternatives: hypnosis, laser, or acupuncture. These are designed to attract people who are looking for an easy way out. They may or may not help. You may have heard e-cigarettes help people to quit. This may be so, but we do not know what long term effects they may have, and they also help perpetuate the nicotine addiction.

One has to realize that most people attempt to quit 5 or more times before they are successful. One patient of mine said “It’s easy to quit smoking- I’ve done it a hundred times!” Stopping smoking before age 40 has the real probability of extending someone’s life ten years.

It’s Never Too Late To Quit !! The national quit line is: 1-800-QUIT NOW. Become an EX program, Twitter and Facebook also have programs to assist.

Sincerely,
Donald A. Potts, MD
Mayo Clinic Certified Tobacco Treatment Specialist

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The Friends, The Support, The Focus

If 75% of tobacco users wish to quit, the spirit and mind must be addressed with similar intensity as the needs of the physical body. Since we are social creatures, we need to surround ourselves with those who support us and encourage us to be the best we can be. Friends influence our behaviors for good or they may negatively influence us encouraging us to make poor choices. Creating distance from these people may be required.



Overcoming any addictive behavior- smoking, gambling, illicit drugs, excessive eating, alcohol, or pornography is enhanced when support systems are in place to help celebrate each victory and walk beside us through the dark valleys. As a friend or as a congregation we are called to be present for those in need. Non-judgmental attitudes and supportive prayers are additional ways to offer assistance.

“...for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” II Corinthians 6:16

Changing our focus is important. Focusing on something (someone) beyond ourselves helps us make the decision to change unhealthy behaviors. It may be a closer relationship with God, a happier life, a better relationship, or living long enough to grandparent a special child that provides the incentive to live differently. The focus or goal we choose must be valued higher than the sacrifice required if we are to change.

Is it time to deep-clean our spiritual house (our temple) with a new focus and change of behavior?

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