



# Go Healthy and Breathe Deep!

by KATHY TAYLOR-ROGERS

**M**aking significant changes in one's lifestyle takes a lot of energy but it can be well worth it. When changes don't work, I think part of the reason is that not enough thought, soul searching and preparation have gone into making the decision. People need to really own a decision before they can succeed with following through on it. There are many things that people who care about us attempt to persuade us to do, but we need to decide to make significant changes in our lives or the change is unlikely to last.

If you are a smoker and have given any thought to quitting then this article is here to encourage you to do the 'soul searching' and planning necessary in order to make the decision to quit and stick to it. Did you know that according to the 2004 Surgeon General Report, smoking harms nearly every organ of the body, causing many diseases and reducing the health of smokers in general? The list of diseases caused by smoking includes: bladder disease, esophageal disease, laryngeal disease, lung disease, oral disease, throat cancer, chronic lung diseases, coronary heart and cardiovascular diseases, negative reproductive effects, abdominal aortic aneurysm, acute myeloid leukemia, cataracts, cervical cancer, kidney cancer, pancreatic cancer, pneumonia, periodontitis and stomach cancer. Smoking has been directly related to emphysema, heart disease, and is the leading cause of lung cancer. Who among us does not know of at least one person who has died of heart complications who was a known heavy smoker? Other negative aspects of smoking are: the financial burden that it places on the smoker and their family; unpleasant odors resulting from smoking; higher life/health

insurance premiums; and, the damage that smoking does to one's emotional well-being in today's society. The Surgeon General's Report (2004) also states that cigarettes with lower machine measured yields of tar and nicotine provide no clear benefit to health. In other words, smoking 'light' cigarettes does not reduce the risks to your health.

Despite all of the bad news, there is good news. The Surgeon General's Report also indicates that making the choice to quit smoking will have the effect of reducing risks for diseases caused by smoking and improving health in general. With the extensive list of ways that smoking can be harmful to your health, there is every good reason to quit and no good reason to continue to smoke. Most smokers who make the decision to quit smoking and stick to it report feeling healthier and more energetic once the toxins from the nicotine have a chance to leave their system. We only get one body and one chance at life; don't you want to make the most of it? I do not in any way mean to minimize the addictive nature of nicotine, but there are many ways to deal with the addiction issues involved in the quitting process that will minimize, if not eliminate, the discomfort of nicotine withdrawal. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to make excuses for why we won't do something that we know will benefit us: "The harm is probably already done"; "I'll quit when I'm ready"; "Now is not a good time to quit because I've got too much going on at work"; "I know a guy who has smoked three packages of cigarettes a day since he was 15 years old and he just turned 82"; etc. These excuses will only become regrets if you are suddenly diagnosed with a terminal disease. The last thing anyone wants to say during his or her lifetime is: "If only I had listened to you." Even worse, in some cases it is the family left to say: "If only she had listened to me when I begged her to quit".

For those who make the decision to quit, studies have shown five steps that will help you to quit for good. These steps are as follows:

## 1. Get Ready

- Set a quit date.
- Change your environment to get rid of *all* cigarettes and ashtrays in your home, car, place of work – don't let people smoke around you.

## Teachers Go Healthy Contest Winner

Congratulations to **Barbara Moores** of St. George's Elementary in Conception Bay South for the winning entry in the EAP Teachers Go Healthy Contest.

Thank you to all teachers who participated in the contest. Entries received will now be used to compile a menu planner for teachers.

- Review your past attempts to quit and think about what worked and what didn't.
- Once you quit, don't smoke at *all*.
- Make a list all of the reasons that you want to quit and read them to yourself everyday.

## 2. Get Support and Encouragement

- Studies show that you have a better chance of being successful if you have help.
- Ask your family and friends for their support, which will include not smoking around you or leaving cigarettes where you can see them.
- Get individual, group, or telephone counselling as this can double your chance of success – telephone counselling is available through the Smokers Help Line at 1-800-363-5864.

## 3. Learn New Skills and Behaviors

- Try to distract yourself from urges to smoke. Talk to someone, go for a walk, or get busy with a task.
- When you first try to quit, change your routine. Use a different route to work, drink tea instead of coffee, and eat breakfast in a different place.
- Do something to reduce your stress, like taking a hot bath, exercising or reading a book; plan something enjoyable to do every day.
- Drink a lot of water and other fluids to help flush the nicotine and other chemicals from your system.
- Visit the dentist and have your teeth cleaned to get rid of the tobacco stains or even consider having them whitened and resolve to keep those stains away.

## 4. Get Medication and Use it Correctly

- Medications can help you stop smoking, such as Bupropion SR, nicotine gum, nicotine inhaler, nicotine nasal spray, nicotine patch, nicotine lozenge. Check with your doctor to determine which medication might work best for you and follow directions on the package.
- Medications will double your chances of quitting and quitting for good.

## 5. Be Prepared for Relapse or Difficult Situations

- Most relapses occur within the first three months after quitting. Don't be discouraged if you start smoking again. Most people try several times before they finally quit. It may be worthwhile to avoid the following triggers: alcohol, as drinking lowers your chances for success; other smokers; weight gain – many smokers will gain weight when they quit but usually less than 10 pounds, so eat healthy and stay active to avoid letting weight gain distract you from your goal; try chewing gum, brushing your teeth more often or sucking on a strong menthol-eucalyptus flavored cough drop to relieve the urge to snack instead of smoking.

Be alert for bad moods or signs of depression – you may become somewhat irritable while quitting. Be cognizant of this and try to do things you enjoy

when you find yourself feeling down or irritable. Note that some smoking cessation medications can reduce the risk of depression.

We only get one chance at life. Don't let a habit take control of your life and create health problems that could end up costing you everything. Life is too precious. Do not allow procrastination to get in your way and do not delude yourself by thinking nothing bad will ever happen to you if you continue smoking. Take control now and *quit* – do it for you, for your family, for your children, for your spouse, for your grandchildren. Do it for the health of it!

If you would like to avail of further resources to assist you in your effort to quit smoking, please refer to the Health Canada website at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca). Once on the website, click on the Healthy Living tab and scroll down and click on Tobacco. Another consideration is reading the book *Tainted Love: Diary of a Smoker*, by Trina Triano. This book chronicles Trina's difficult journey to quit a 34-year-old habit.

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