

## Quitting Smoking: A Journey Worth Taking

World No Tobacco Day, held on May 31 every year, is an initiative from the World Health Organization to address the global epidemic of tobacco use. If I walked down any street in Western NL and asked each person that I met “What are the health risks of smoking cigarettes?”, I am confident that just about every person, even children, could identify a long list of illnesses and health issues associated with tobacco use. Common themes would be damaging the heart and lungs, asthma, stroke and cancers. Most people who smoke are well aware of the health risks of using tobacco, as there is a picture and message on each package of cigarettes sold. However, for many, knowing the risks is not enough to transition from smoker to ex-smoker.

Quitting smoking is not just kicking a habit; it is about committing to a lifestyle change that could affect many aspects of that person’s life. In addition to the physical addiction, there may be behavioural changes, social impacts and psychological issues that will have to be addressed and overcome during a quit journey.

Smoking cigarettes is an addiction. Smoking creates a strong addiction to nicotine, a chemical dependence that experts compare to heroin addiction, when discussing how difficult it is to overcome. Despite this challenge, many people are successful with quitting. Each quit attempt is a learning experience, and it takes on average, seven attempts to finally succeed. “Keep quitting” is not a common mantra, but in this context, it is certainly appropriate encouragement. From each quit attempt, smokers who want to quit can gain confidence in their abilities to face withdrawal symptoms, become aware of their personal triggers, and learn to identify and handle challenging situations. To help deal with the physical symptoms of avoiding nicotine, individuals who smoke are encouraged to speak to a pharmacist, doctor or other health care provider about nicotine replacement therapies or medications to help with their next quit attempt.

When quitting smoking, some people have to make significant behavioural changes. From the simple action of keeping hands busy with a fidget toy and chewing gum, to a more complete overhaul of daily routines, different strategies will help different people. For example, if an individual is used to lighting up every time they drive their vehicle, it will be important to have a plan for how this will change. Perhaps it will involve listening to a new play list or an audio-book, having the car stocked with straws, gum and mints, or putting a picture of a loved one on the dash as a reminder of their commitment to change. It is helpful to prepare in advance for changes to smoking routines.

Social gatherings with friends and family members who smoke can be a difficult situation for people trying to quit smoking. No one would suggest that new non-smokers isolate themselves from their family and friends. This is a time when their support and understanding is needed. Communication is key—individuals who are quitting smoking may want to let their friends and family members know about their desire to quit, let them know how they may support their efforts to quit and find ways to be together without smoking.

For some smokers, a cigarette is their best friend. Giving up the enjoyment of the cigarette itself and addressing psychological issues of grief and loss, stress, fatigue, fear, etc. without a cigarette as the go-to coping mechanism can be an obstacle to quitting. There are many options for dealing with these, and all of life's ups and downs, instead of turning to smoking. Support is easily accessible through connecting with the provincial Smokers' Helpline which offers valuable tips and information to help with quitting. The Helpline can be reached through calling the phone number on cigarette packages or toll-free at 1-800-363-5864 (LUNG). Email and text programs are also available online at [smokershelp.net](http://smokershelp.net).

Quitting smoking is a journey worth taking. World No Tobacco Day, as well as any other day that suits you, is a good day to start that journey. For help with that journey, contact your health care provider, speak to your pharmacist or doctor, or call the Smokers' Helpline toll free 1-800-363-5864. It is never too late and every day is a good day to quit.

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