

On the Road to Quitting

With the start of a new year and the creation of new resolutions for a better 2016, now is an excellent time to consider quitting smoking. There are numerous benefits of being smoke-free such as better lung function, more energy, decreased risk of disease and better overall health. Quitting smoking is not an easy undertaking, but there are many supports available for help along the way.

The tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest global public health threats. Tobacco use kills six million individuals each year: 5 million smokers and over 600,000 non-smokers due to second-hand exposure to smoke. Tobacco is the only substance that when used as intended will harm the user. As well, second-hand smoke is hazardous to health with no safe level of exposure. However, efforts to reduce tobacco use and its negative health benefits have been successful. According to the Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drugs Survey (CTADS), currently in Newfoundland and Labrador, only 20% of the population report being smokers compared to 28% in 2000. For those aged 15-19, this number has improved further from 28% in 2000 to 12%.

There are many national, provincial and regional initiatives that promote tobacco-free living. In the Western region, Western Health and the Tobacco Free Network offer Student Wellness Action Team (SWAT) training to schools. This training provides students with education regarding the negative effects of tobacco use and empowers them to educate others on the health risks of smoking. Student teams that attend SWAT training become advocates for a smoke-free environment in their schools.

National Non-Smoking Week has been observed in January for the last 30 years. This event is marked by health organizations across the country as a time to draw attention to the negative impacts of tobacco use and to support individuals in living tobacco free. The goals of National Non-Smoking Week are:

- To educate Canadians about the dangers of smoking;
- To prevent non-smokers from starting to smoke and becoming addicted to tobacco;
- To help smokers quit;
- To promote the right of individuals to breathe air unpolluted by tobacco smoke;
- To de-normalize tobacco products and tobacco-use; and
- To encourage a smoke-free society in Canada.

This year, National Non-Smoking Week is taking place January 17-23. To celebrate this week, consider quitting smoking, helping a friend quit or learning more about nicotine addiction.

For individuals who wish to quit smoking, there are supports available, including the Newfoundland and Labrador Smokers' Helpline. The NL Smokers' Helpline is a free, confidential counselling service available to individuals who want to quit smoking and stay smoke free. The NL Smokers' Helpline offers a variety of services such as providing information on smoking cessation, telephone or web-based counselling and fax based referral system.

For more information on smoking cessation and for support to quit smoking, contact the Newfoundland and Labrador's Smokers' helpline at www.smokershelp.net or call 1-800-363-5864.

Mariel Parcon
Regional Health Educator