

November 15, 2019 is the Great American Smoke Out (GASO)

Nearly 38 million Americans smoke cigarettes, and smoking remains the single largest preventable cause of death and illness in the world. In the US alone, smoking causes more than 480,000 deaths every year. In addition, more than 16 million Americans live with a smoking-related disease. While the cigarette smoking rate has dropped significantly, from 42% in 1965 to less than 15.5% in 2016, some groups of Americans suffer disproportionately from smoking-related cancer and other diseases. These groups include those who have less education, who live below the poverty level, or who suffer from serious psychological distress, as well as certain racial and ethnic groups, and lesbians, gays and bisexuals.

Quitting smoking at any age improves health immediately and over the long term. Stopping smoking is hard, but the chance of success increases with help. Getting help through counseling and medications doubles or even triples chances of quitting successfully. The US Surgeon General has said, “Smoking cessation [stopping smoking] represents the single most important step that smokers can take to enhance the length and quality of their lives.”

It’s hard to quit smoking, but it can be done. What can family and friends do to make quitting easier for someone?

Do respect that the quitter is in charge. This is their lifestyle change and their challenge, not yours.

Do ask the person whether they want you to ask regularly how they’re doing. Ask how they’re feeling – not just whether they’ve stayed quit.

Do let the person know that it’s OK to talk to you whenever they need to hear encouraging words.

Do help the quitter get what they need, such as hard candy to suck on, straws to chew on, and fresh veggies cut up and kept in the refrigerator.

Do spend time doing things with the quitter to keep their mind off smoking – go to the movies, take a walk to get past a craving (what many call a “nicotine fit”), or take a bike ride together.

Do try to see it from the smoker’s point of view – a smoker’s habit may feel like an old friend that’s always been there when times were tough. It’s hard to give that up.

Do make your home smoke free, meaning that no one can smoke in any part of the house.

Do remove all lighters and ash trays from your home. Remove anything that reminds them of smoking

Do wash clothes that smell like smoke. Clean carpets and drapes. Use air fresheners to help get rid of the tobacco smells – and don't forget the car, too.

Do help the quitter with a few chores, some child care, cooking – whatever will help lighten the stress of quitting.

Do celebrate along the way. Quitting smoking is a BIG DEAL!

Don't doubt the smoker's ability to quit. Your faith in them reminds them they can do it.

Don't judge, nag, preach, tease, or scold. This may make the smoker feel worse about him or herself. You don't want your loved one to turn to a cigarette to soothe hurt feelings.

Don't take the quitter's grumpiness personally during their nicotine withdrawal. Tell them that you understand the symptoms are real and remind them that they won't last forever. The symptoms usually get better in about 2 weeks.

Don't offer advice. Just ask how you can help with the plan or program they are using.

For more help contact the NY State Smokers' Quitline at: 1-866 NY-QUITS or NYsmokefree.com. You can find other helpful information about GASO at Cancer.org.

Ken Dahlgren
Tobacco Free Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Allegany