

T O B A C C O 1 0 1

A TOBACCO AND NICOTINE TUTORIAL

By John Slade, M.D.

A different subject is featured in this column in each issue of The Nicotine Challenger. Please send questions or suggestions for topics to Dr. Slade at the Tobacco Dependence Program.

When's the best time to quit?

Here are some answers.

The best time is right now. Before any more damage is done. Before any more money is spent on Marlboro, Camel or Newport. Before anyone else tells me they wish I didn't smoke. Before I have to go looking for another smoke-filled room in which to light up. Before any more damage is done.

The best time is when you're ready to quit. Getting ready means different things to different people. For some, it means not buying another pack and not bumming off of friends. For some, it means making a visit to the pharmacy to get nicotine replacement medication and reviewing how to use it. For some, it means reading a book about quitting or talking first with friends or co-workers about how they quit. For others, getting ready means visiting a web site about quitting or making an appointment with a counselor first.

For still others, getting ready means thinking through the reasons for quitting and for continuing to smoke and weighing which are more important. For others, getting ready means practicing what they will do instead of having a cigarette in particular situations.

Before quitting, or as they quit, some will need to get a better grip on a depression, on feelings of anxiety, on a drinking problem, or on some other disorder that makes it more difficult to stop smoking. This may require specific treatment for the co-occurring disorder.

When's the best time to quit? One possible answer to this question is always wrong: before it's too late. It's never too late to quit. Many middle-aged and older people make an excuse to themselves that the damage has already been done and there is nothing to be gained from quitting. This is nonsense. This is the voice of the addiction speaking. No matter when a person quits, health improves right away. Within hours of quitting, the body loses its carbon monoxide load, freeing up the blood to carry oxygen more efficiently. The lungs begin to regain some of their

resilience and defenses against disease that permits them to fight off infections such as pneumonia. The chances of dying from a fatal arrhythmia markedly decrease very rapidly, and within a few years of stopping, the chances of dying from a heart attack decline so much that it is as though the person never smoked. In hospital, anesthesiologists urge people scheduled for general anesthesia to suspend smoking for 48 hours before surgery because, even stopping for this short a time reduces post-operative complications.

Yes, it is true that the risk of getting cancer caused by smoking declines only slowly after quitting, but other things get better much faster. Moreover, general health, including wound healing, improve rapidly, so the body is better equipped to fight a cancer if that is set to happen.

I've tried to quit time and again and it never lasts for long. Keep trying. Seek out some assistance to help you. You may want to try the new NJ Quitline (866-NJ-STOPS) or the website (www.njquitnet.net) In addition, direct, face-to-face counseling will be offered in a limited number of places across the state. These services are being developed by the Department of Health and Senior Services as part of its tobacco initiative.

There are a number of scientifically proven ways to help people stop smoking. Everyone who wants to stop should try to do so. If it turns out to be harder than expected, seek out some help. Very soon, there will be a lot more help available.

Readers wanting up-to-date information about the availability of state-sponsored quit smoking services should call our office for the latest information.

When's the best time to quit? For many people, there is no time like right now. For others, some preparation or some timing is in order. If that preparation involves getting some expert advice, there has never been a better time to quit in New Jersey than right now.



Training for Tobacco Dependence Treatment

A process has recently begun in New Jersey to intensively treat tobacco dependence. While a few practitioners have been offering treatment over recent years, this new initiative will prepare counselors in a variety of health and mental health settings with the skills to provide ongoing care to those needing more than brief intervention or simple advice to stop using tobacco.

The Tobacco Dependence Program began providing an intensive 8-day training to approximately twenty clinicians in early November. This first group of clinicians will pilot treatment sites in a variety of settings. The training program will be based on a set of clinical guidelines developed by the program, which outline the "best practices" in the field.

The pilot tobacco dependence treatment programs in New Jersey are:
Catholic Community Services Inc.
Carmel Guild-Newark
973-596-3858

Kennedy Memorial Hospital University
Medical Center, Cherry Hill
856-488-6514

Medical Center of Ocean County
Behavior Health Systems, Brick
732-295-6417

New Hope Foundation, Freehold
732-308-0113

Plainfield Health Center, Plainfield
908-753-6401

Rowan University, Glassboro
856-256-4527

Saint Barnabas Behavioral Health
Center, Beth Israel Site Medical
Center, Newark
973-926-7169

University Behavioral Healthcare,
Mercer/Trenton Addiction Science
Center, Trenton
609-396-7641

Treatment is also available at the clinic operated by the Tobacco Dependence Program. Call 732-846-8660.

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