

The Tobacco Control Office, in addition to implementing tobacco control regulations, is sparing no effort to publicize, educate, and promote a smoke-free culture. Among these efforts, the Tobacco Control Office designed a number of educational health materials that publicize the benefits of not smoking. The harmful effects of smoking are listed and smokers are encouraged to quit and utilise the smoking cessation services. In this issue, "Game Zone" explores some of the educational health materials for our readers. Readers only need to match the appropriate slogan(s) with the following educational health materials, and fax the answer(s) together with their name, address, and contact telephone number to: 2575 8944; one could also post to the Tobacco Control Office at 25th floor, Wu Chung House, no. 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai. Readers who have all the answers correct will receive a souvenir. All are welcome to join. The closing date is 30 Oct 2009.

All of the answers are located at the Tobacco Control Office's Web site www.tco.gov.hk.

Please fill in the blanks:



Answer _____



Answer _____



Answer _____



Answer _____

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Department of Health Smoking Cessation Hotline **1833183**

Address: 18/F & 25/F, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

Enquiry Hotline: 2961 8823 Website: www.tco.gov.hk



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DOUBTS ABOUT SMOKING

Smoking stinks but Why do People Start Smoking?

According to the 2008 Thematic Household Survey, some 60% of smokers admitted that they started smoking because of the influence of friends while 40% of smokers stated that they tried smoking out of curiosity. Other frequently mentioned reasons include "necessity in social functions", "influence of family members", "easing tension", "refreshing one's mind", and so on.

In fact, in certain peer groups, the act of smoking has symbolic meanings. Some may just start smoking to show that they are part of the group. For example, in the 1960s and the 1970s, many working males were smokers. A fifteen- or sixteen-year-old young man just entering the workforce might think that if he smoked, he would become part of this peer group and had the group's recognition and acceptance. This is a common story from the elderly smokers. Nowadays, the smoking population is shrinking and smoking is no longer popular. However, young people may start smoking in order to show that they are 'special' and rebellious.

Many smokers do not think that they will become addicted when they first start smoking. They think that smoking is just a habit which can be easily controlled. However, the nicotine in cigarettes has a powerful effect in smokers' brain, such that when they want to quit subsequently, they find that they are hooked. At present, more than half a million people in Hong Kong had, at one time or another pledged to quit smoking. However, less than 60% can succeed. Quitting smoking is not an easy task.



Why quitting smoking is so difficult?

For some, quitting smoking is easy and they can quit smoking overnight. For others, quitting smoking is difficult, and they fail repeatedly. The following are some reasons why people fail to quit smoking and our recommendations to help them succeed.

The addictive nature of nicotine

Smoking cessation is difficult because of nicotine. Nicotine is a natural ingredient in tobacco that is addictive, similar to heroin. Chronic smokers become dependent on nicotine not only physically but also mentally. When a person smokes, nicotine is sucked into the lungs, where it is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream and sent to the brain. The human brain cells have a kind of receiver known as the nicotine receptor (scientific name: $\alpha 4 \beta 2$ receptor). When a large amount of nicotine is rapidly delivered to the brain through the blood, the nicotine will attach to the nicotine receptors. The brain cells are stimulated and release a substance known as dopamine that gives the smoker a pleasant feeling. In order to obtain pleasant feelings, the human body produces more nicotine receptors on the brain cells to receive the nicotine. Anatomical studies have confirmed that after a substantial period of smoking, the brain cells of the smoker are full of these nicotine receptors.

Nicotine makes smokers feel happy -- so isn't that good? Unfortunately, smokers who continue to smoke will no longer be satisfied with the same amount of nicotine. This is because their body will slowly become numb to the stimulation of dopamine (the pleasure-giving substance). Medically, this is known as drug tolerance. Over time, nicotine ceases to make the smokers feel good. Conversely, if the smokers suddenly stop smoking, the brain's nicotine receptors will send out disturbing signals within a few hours to encourage the smokers to inhale more



nicotine in order to obtain the pleasure-giving dopamine. As a result, the smokers no longer smoke to make themselves happy, but rather to alleviate the disturbing signals from the brain. These are known as withdrawal symptoms. Due to its addictive properties, nicotine has changed the smokers' brain and now controls their behavior.

"You claim that smoking damages my brain, but why don't I have any brain damage after smoking for so many years?" Nicotine itself does not cause cancer, or affect your mental ability and limb movements. It insidiously changes the smoker's brain and makes them addicted. How do the smokers know whether they are addicted to nicotine? If the smokers have the following signs, then they are addicted:

- ✧ Symptoms such as nausea or dizziness which appeared when the smoker first started smoking do not occur anymore.
- ✧ The amount of smoking gradually increases.
- ✧ Withdrawal symptoms begin to appear when not being able to smoke for a period (for example, during a long-distance flight).
- ✧ When they want to smoke all of the time (for example, after waking up, after meals and in the toilet).
- ✧ When the craving for cigarettes appears, they will smoke even when they are confined to bed by sickness, or in a no-smoking area.

Withdrawal symptoms are broadly divided into two types: psychological and physiological symptoms. Psychological symptoms include depression, bad temper, and anxiety. Physiological symptoms include dizziness, insomnia, restlessness, hunger, headache, fatigue, and cough with excessive phlegm. When the smokers stop smoking, withdrawal symptoms will appear in a matter of hours and reach the peak after 48-72 hours. The symptoms will continue for a few days to several weeks. The onset of withdrawal symptoms is a major factor for failure to quit smoking. Pharmacotherapy is an effective method for smokers to fight against withdrawal symptoms.

How should I start?

Getting started is always difficult. A question that smokers often ask is: How should I quit smoking? It is important for a smoker to have a comprehensive plan that enables a smoker to stop smoking properly step by step.

First, the smoker must have a clear understanding of one's reasons for quitting. Then, the smoker should find the most suitable way to quit smoking and seek the support of friends, family, counselors, and health care workers to strengthen one's confidence. Set a quit date early, estimate the difficulties one will face and develop a list of corresponding solutions and award scheme.

Off on the wrong foot - gradually reducing one's frequency of smoking

Currently, there is no evidence that gradually reducing the frequency of smoking is an effective method for quitting. This approach cannot completely purge a smokers' dependence on nicotine and, more importantly, it cannot change a smokers' unhealthy living habits (such as using smoking as a stress-relieving tool for everyday life). Clinical experiences have found that the frequency reduction method to quit smoking often fails because smokers need closer monitoring and

treatment to control the more serious withdrawal symptoms.

When starting to quit, smokers should adopt an all-at-once approach, viz quitting without hesitation and dispose of all cigarettes, ashtrays, and lighters.

In addition, smokers may use drugs to control the possible withdrawal symptoms, or receive counseling (individual, group, or phone) to increase the chance of success.

Why some successful quitters cannot stop smoking forever, and eventually relapse?

If the smokers know how to handle the withdrawal symptoms, smoking cessation can be smooth. As they stop inhaling nicotine, the number of nicotine receptors on the brain cells will decrease gradually but a small number of nicotine receptors will persist. When experiencing mood swings or important life events, these remnant receptors will be re-activated and induce the ex-smokers to smoke again. It is worth noting that this situation can occur 10 years or even 20 years after the smoker has quit smoking successfully. If the successful quitter cannot control his or her cravings, he or she will start smoking again. That is the main reason why some successful quitters fail to stop smoking forever.



Important Tips To prevent smoking relapse

- ✧ First, analyze the past experience of smoking cessation and scrutinize one's problems to avoid repeating the same mistakes.
- ✧ When quitting smoking, stay away from places where people are smoking; when offered cigarettes, decline firmly.
- ✧ Avoid drinking alcoholic or caffeinated beverages which provoke the desire to smoke.
- ✧ There are many ways to resist the craving to smoking, such as deep breathing and drinking plenty of water. When a craving starts, one can delay the craving for a few minutes with a distraction, such as brushing teeth, or talking to others. If someone offers a cigarette, one should tell him or her that you have quit smoking. One can also recount the reasons of quitting smoking and write them down as future reminders.
- ✧ If one has a relapse, don't be discouraged nor give up. Instead, stop immediately and success is still in sight.

For those who have been troubled by stress or weight problems in the past, they should have relevant solution in place. For example, to cope with emotional stress, one can do more regular exercises, listen to light music, share one's feelings with others, seek professional help, or find religious support. For weight control, one can eat more low-calorie (low-fat and low sugar) food, fruits and vegetables, as well as foods high in fiber. It is better to take small and regular meals and to exercise regularly.

What are smoking cessation drugs? How should one use them?

The purpose of using smoking cessation drugs is to reduce and relieve one's withdrawal symptoms and increases the chance of success. As for the types of drug, they are broadly divided into two types: Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) and non-NRT. Common NRT includes nicotine patches (long-acting), nicotine gums (short-acting), nicotine inhalers (short-acting), and nicotine lozenges (short-acting).

Non-NRT require a prescription from doctor or dentist. Quitters must follow the dosage in the prescription and start the drug one week before the quit date. Commonly used non-NRT drugs are Bupropion and Varenicline.

Points to note when using NRT:

- ✧ Read the instructions on the package carefully.
- ✧ Be patient. Allow time for the drug to take effect.
- ✧ Start with sufficient dosage to control the withdrawal symptoms and cravings to smoke.
- ✧ Acidic beverages and foods, such as soft drinks, fruits, and tea will affect the absorption of oral NRT; so avoid drinking/eating 15 minutes before use, with the exception of water.
- ✧ Never use NRT and smoke at the same time.
- ✧ Gradually lower the dosage after using NRT for 8-12 weeks.
- ✧ After finishing a course of NRT, keep a small amount of NRT in place to alleviate sudden craving for smoking.
- ✧ For details on adverse reactions related problems when using NRT, you should consult your family doctor, dentist, pharmacist, or call the Department of Health's Smoking Cessation Hotline at 1833 183.



Where can smokers go to look for assistance?

A vast majority of smokers need professional assistance to quit smoking. Ever since 2003, the Department of Health has been providing a one-stop smoking cessation service for people who want to quit smoking. Doctors, nurses, and smoke-free ambassadors are there to provide professional counseling and drug treatment. In 2009, the Department of Health further strengthens its smoking cessation services in the community.

The Department of Health (DH) is working together with the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGHs) on a three-year community-based smoking cessation programme and set up several Integrated Centres on Smoking Cessation (TWGHs ICSC) in the territory. The opening hour includes evenings and weekends, to facilitate access of working smokers. TWGHs provide free medical treatments, counseling and other follow up services.

Smoking Cessation Clinics:

Hong Kong:

- i. Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Integrated Centre on Smoking Cessation (TWGHs ICSC) (Wan Chai Suboffice)
Address: 11/F, Tung Sun Commercial Center, 194-200 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai

Kowloon:

- i. Ngau Tau Kok smoking cessation clinics of the Department of Health
Address: Ngau Tau Kok, No. 60 Ting On Street, Ngau Tau Kok Jockey Club Clinic, 2nd Floor, Department of Health, Education and Training Center of Family Medicine
- ii. TWGHs ICSC (Mong Kok Office)
Address: 26/F, Kwong Fa Commercial Center, No. 42 Kwong Wa Street, Mong Kok

New Territories:

- i. TWGHs ICSC, (Sha Tin Suboffice)
Address: 3/F, Lek Yuen Health Center, No. 9 Lek Yuen Street, Sha Tin
- ii. TWGHs ICSC (Tuen Mun Suboffice)
Address: 4/F, Tuen Mun Butterfly Bay Community Center, Butterfly Estate, Tuen Mun

Selling tobacco products to a teenager under the age of 18 years is liable for a fine of up to HKD25,000

Article 15A of the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance provides that no person shall sell any tobacco product to anyone under the age of 18. The offender is liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of HKD25,000. In fact, retailers might ask the buyer to show proof of age and refuse to sell tobacco products to persons under 18-year-old. To remind the public of the relevant provisions, the law also requires those who sell tobacco products to set up a prescribed sign at a prominent area of their sales location to show that tobacco products cannot be sold to anyone under the age of 18, or else they can also be liable for a fine of up to HKD25,000.

When the Tobacco Control Office receives a complaint that someone has sold tobacco products to a person under the age of 18 years, Tobacco Control Inspectors will go to the premises concerned to investigate, collect evidence, and issue summons to any offenders. The Tobacco Control Office will not assign minors to attempt to buy tobacco products from retailers. This is because past studies failed to show that such actions will effectively reflect the actual law-abiding behavior of the retailers of tobacco products. Minors assigned to buy tobacco products might behave and perform differently than they would in a real situation. In addition, personal safety is another consideration. From January to October of 2008, the Tobacco Control Office summoned six tobacco retailers who sold tobacco products to persons under the age of 18.

However, the implementation of legislation to prevent young people from buying cigarettes without other comprehensive, evidence-based tobacco control measures is not effective to prevent young people from initiating a smoking habit. In fact, the tobacco industry and its funded organizations would over emphasize law enforcement to divert the attention of the government and community organizations onto ineffective tobacco control measures. In addition, they would cultivate the erroneous impression that "smoking is an adult behavior" to induce young people to smoke.

The World Health Organization has emphasised that only comprehensive tobacco control programs can effectively reduce smoking rates. These programs include raising tobacco prices through tax increases and other measures; banning all forms of tobacco advertising and promotion; setting up smoke-free areas at workplaces, public places, transportation places and residential areas; educating young people about nicotine addiction and the risks of tobacco use; and promoting smoking cessation to all smokers, including both young people and adults. Therefore, the Tobacco Control Office is not only enforcing the law that prohibits the sale of cigarettes to young people, but also implementing other measures such as enforcing the smoking ban, promoting smoke-free culture to all people, and providing smoking cessation services.



According to the "Thematic Household Survey Report No. 36" (available at the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department Web site), the current daily cigarette smoking population totals approximately 680,000 people, accounting for 11.8% of the local population who are over the age of 15. Among these, many smokers want or have tired to quit smoking; Nevertheless, there is still no lack of "loyal" smokers among them.

Studies have shown that the proportion of female smokers is on the rise. This is a group worthy of our attention. Furthermore, elderly smokers also need to be noted. Over the past decade, the proportion of elderly smokers in Hong Kong has been stable. They belong to a group that is much less likely to take an initiative to quit smoking.

The difficulty in quitting smoking is not only the physical discomfort caused by nicotine withdrawal; many misconceptions exist in our society about giving up smoking. All of these make smokers even more unwilling to quit. Take female smokers as an example. Some of them believe that smoking helps them maintain a slim figure, so they try to control their weight by smoking. Many elderly people think that quitting smoking would not be beneficial to old people like them; some even think that giving up smoking could cause death. In view of this, in early 2009 the Tobacco Control Office, Department of Health launched two sets of Announcement of Public Interests (APIs) targeting at these two categories of people. The Tobacco Control Office hoped that these APIs would help to refute some fallacies, such as smoking helps one maintain one's figure and elderly smokers do not benefit from quitting smoking; it is envisaged that promoting a culture of quitting smoking in their communities would strengthen their determination to quit smoking.

Tobacco Control Bulletin is here again! In this issue, "Cover Story" section explains the difficulties and their causes that smokers often encounter when quitting smoking. The "Kicking the Smoking Habit" clarifies the public's misconceptions, as well as some fallacies about smoking cessation. "Local News on Tobacco Control" looks at the publicity surrounding the Tobacco Control Office's smoking cessation short films launched in January and review the smoking prevalence in 2008. In addition, the "Tobacco Control Stories" analyses the regulation and law enforcement procedure of selling tobacco products to persons under the age of 18 in Hong Kong. Finally, of course, there is the readers' favorite - "Game Zone." In the process of playing the games, I hope that everyone gains a better understanding of the smoke free culture introduced by the Tobacco Control Office. Remember, a lovely souvenir will be awarded if you know all the answers!



Fallacies and prejudices?

Currently, smoking cessation has become a new trend. Smokers, for a variety of different reasons, are looking for various channels for smoking cessation. However, some people still hesitate, for fear of the "consequences" after quitting smoking. Are there really "consequences" for those who quit smoking? Be them true or false, let us go over these fallacies together now!

Is it pointless for elderly smokers to give up smoking?

Studies indicate that, even for smokers above 60 years, if they successfully quit smoking, they will recover an average of three years of life that would be lost due to smoking. Even giving up smoking for only a week can still have enormous benefit on their cardio-pulmonary functions and improve their quality of life. Consequently, regardless of age, it is very worthwhile to quit smoking and the earlier the better.

Severe problems would occur if one stops smoking.

One might as well continue to smoke! Right?

As we all know, smoking leads to incurable diseases and eventually, the smoker's death. Many smokers stop smoking after knowing that they are suffering from an incurable disease, however it is already too late. Nevertheless smoking cessation allows one to live a bit more comfortably before one passes away. It is precisely because of this phenomenon that gives people the fallacy that a number of people, after they give up smoking, suffer from cancer and die soon. In fact, this is the other way round.

Quitting all at once is not easy. It is better to gradually reduce the amount of smoking!

There is no evidence that gradually decreasing the amount of smoking is effective in quitting smoking. This is because it cannot end nicotine dependence. Nor does it change the original living habits of the smokers. For example, some smokers use it as a stress-relieving tool; clinical experience has found that gradual smoking cessation usually leads to failure. For people who quit smoking and have serious symptoms, they require close monitoring and treatment to support them, rather than using the method of gradually decreasing the amount of smoking.

It should be safer to smoke low-tar tobacco products!

A number of studies have indicated that low-tar and low-nicotine content cigarettes have the same harmful effects as other tobacco products. Smokers should not use the tar content label on cigarette package to evaluate the harmful effects of various types of tobacco products. In fact, smokers who smoke these "low-tar" cigarettes are prone to smoke more and inhale deeper to make up for the missing amount of nicotine in each cigarette, which poses an even greater health hazard.

Marking cigarette packets as containing lower tar or nicotine content is a sales tactic of the tobacco industry. It aims at nothing more than deceiving smokers in order to ensure the sales volume of tobacco products. For that reason, you cannot judge the safety of smoking from a content label!