

Strategies to stop smoking

BLUE RIDGE HEALTHCARE

MORGANTON - A decision to quit smoking is the single best thing you can do for your health and the health of those around you. But the task is never easy.

Smoking is not only a bad habit but a powerful addiction.

A smoker gets 200 to 300 doses daily of nicotine, a highly addictive substance.

Jan and her husband Tom decided together to stop smoking when they learned she was pregnant. With a strong motivation, they supported each other through a successful effort to quit.

"A decision to stop smoking is unquestionably the single best thing you can do for your health and that of those around," said Camille Welch, Blue Ridge HealthCare's Tobacco Prevention Coordinator. "And it's also one of the hardest to accomplish."

Unlike Jan and Tom, most smokers try many times before they quit successfully.

In addition to being at risk of lung cancer and emphysema, a woman who smokes is six times more likely than a non-smoker to suffer a heart attack.

Expectant and nursing mothers, of course, have special reasons to quit because the toxins go directly from mother to child.

Women who smoke may have more trouble getting pregnant. And women merely exposed to second hand smoke have an increased risk of miscarriage and of delivering a pre-term, low-birth-weight child. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is significantly more likely to occur in mothers who smoke.

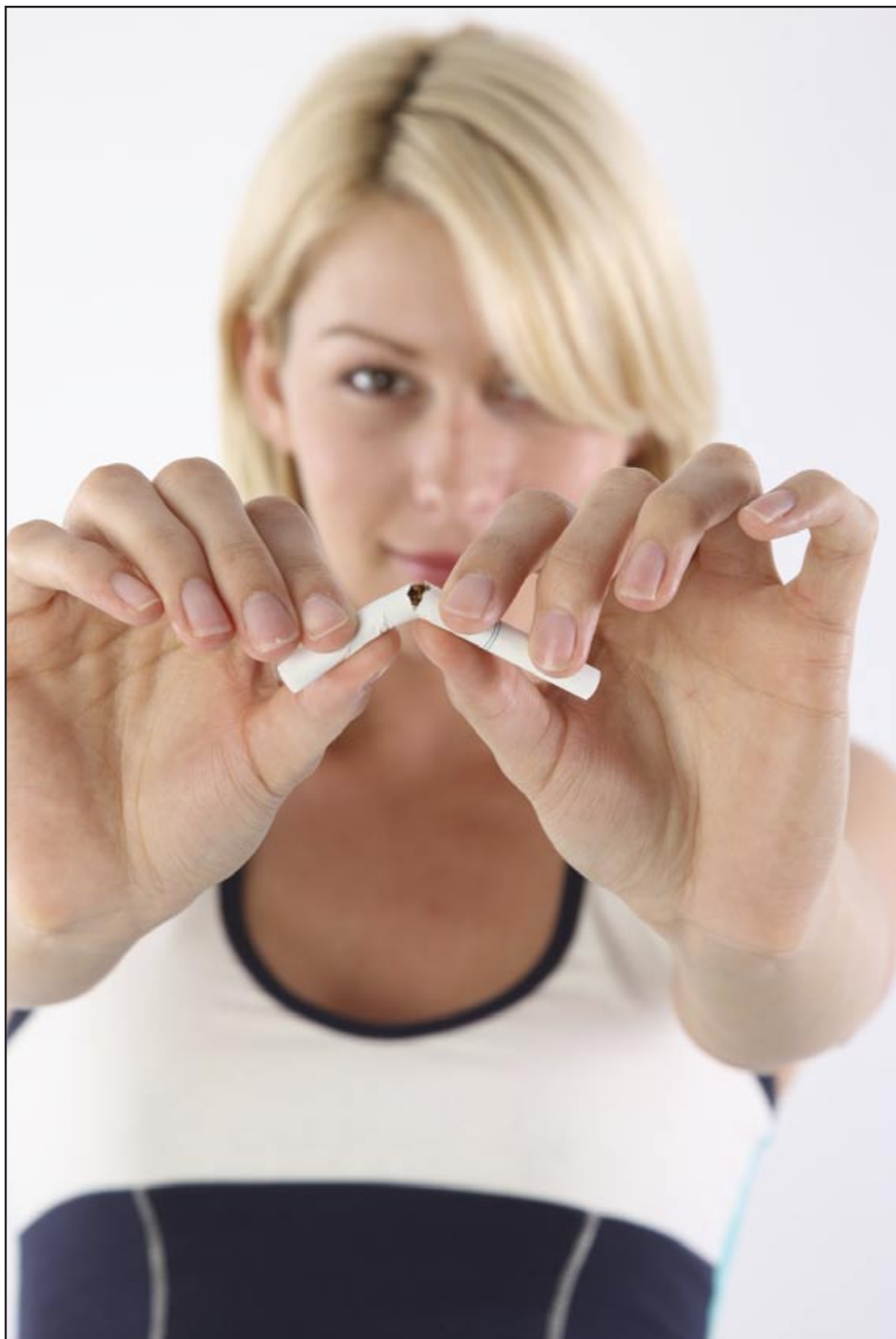
"Although male smokers have always outnumbered female smokers, lung cancer rates in American women have climbed and only recently begun to level off," Welch said. "Rates for women are now almost equal to those of men, even though men are still more likely to smoke."

Experts point out that women continued to take up the smoking habit during the 1960s and 1970s when men were beginning to quit.

Some studies indicate that women may be more vulnerable to lung cancer - developing cancer earlier and with a lower level of smoke exposure than men.

And they apparently have a harder time quitting - perhaps in part because those who quit gain an average of 10 pounds in the months that follow.

It won't be easy



Camille Welch

Breaking the habit won't be easy, but you should try. Some studies indicate that women may be more vulnerable to lung cancer - developing cancer earlier and with a lower level of smoke exposure than men. And they apparently have a harder time quitting - perhaps in part because those who quit gain an average of 10 pounds in the months that follow.

COLD TURKEYS ARE RARE

If you are considering a move to stop smoking, Jan and Tom are positive examples, but it's important to realize that they are not typical. They were not heavy smokers and had been smoking for a relatively short time.

"Smoking is more than a bad habit," Welch said. "A typical smoker gets 200 to 300 doses of nicotine, a highly addictive substance, every day."

By comparison, a cocaine addict gets 5 to 15 doses and a heroin addict only 2 doses a day.

A cigarette makes an addicted smoker feel good almost immediately, but the

START STOPPING

The acronym for stop smoking success is START:

Set a quit date.

Tell others that you plan to quit.

Anticipate your challenges.

Remove cigarettes, ashtrays and lighters from your home, car and work.

Talk to your doctor about getting help.

effect wears off quickly. And if you attempt to smoke less, your body objects because, as with any addictive drug, increasingly large doses are needed to get the same effect.

CUTTING BACK, as a result, is one strategy that is almost guaranteed to fail. Studies show that if they are limited in the number of cigarettes available to them, smokers adjust their inhaling to maintain the level of nicotine they want and need.

If tapering off has any value at all, it may be as preparation for an all-out effort to quit - warming up for the task ahead.

GETTING HELP: If you need help - and most smokers do - the first step might be talking to your doctor. A doctor's advice and encouragement has been found to be an important positive influence.

He or she may guide you to smoking cessation programs in your area and to numerous resources that are available from the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association and the American Heart Association.

Check out smokefree.com, quitnet.com and quitsmokingaids.org. Support groups are available, either in person or on-line.

Before starting, many experts recommend making a list of all the reasons you want to quit and all the benefits you'll gain.

The time and money saved will undoubtedly be part of the list. Some successful quitters decide to keep a "cigarette money" jar and spend the proceeds for a special reward. As for the time spent smoking, exercise is a healthy replacement habit that can become enjoyable, even habit-forming.

"Tell your family and friends that you're planning to quit so they can give you support and encouragement," Welch said, "and so they can understand the mood changes you are bound to experience."

PRESCRIPTION AND OVER-THE-COUNTER PRODUCTS are available to help manage withdrawal symptoms.

Nicotine replacement includes the nicotine patch, gum or lozenges (available over-the-counter) and the prescription nasal spray and inhaler.

"These products take the place of the nicotine that previously was deposited in your system by cigarettes," Welch said. "They are gradually withdrawn as your urge to smoke decreases."

Don't eat or drink anything acidic such as tomato sauce, citrus juice, coffee or soda within a half hour of taking one of these products since that will decrease the product's effectiveness.

Bupropion (Zyban, Wellbutrin) is an antidepressant medication that has been found effective in lessening the urge to smoke.

As you battle the urge to smoke, you may want to keep in mind the rewards of quitting. Within 20 minutes, the poisons will start to leave your body leaving you with a normal blood level of oxygen. Within a few days, you will start to regain your normal senses of taste and smell, and your breathing will be easier.

Take a deep breath, compliment yourself and reward yourself with your favorite meal and a relaxing walk.

Smoking briefs

CHANTIX: ANOTHER WAY TO MAKE QUITTING EASIER

A recent addition to the medications designed to help smokers quit is Chantix. A prescription medication, Chantix works by stimulating the release of low levels of dopamine, a neurochemical responsible for many of the pleasurable feelings smokers get when they light up and inhale. Lower levels of dopamine in the brain are responsible for many of the withdrawal symptoms that occur. Nicotine replacement products and the antidepressant bupropion (Zyban, Wellbutrin) also work by increasing dopamine levels.

EXERCISE TO AVOID WEIGHT GAIN WHEN QUITTING

The possibility of weight gain is a frequent consideration of women desiring to stop smoking. Smoking tends to dull the appetite, and nicotine increases metabolism, explaining the tendency of some smokers to stay slim.

To make up for the metabolic change, experts recommend adding an hour or so of exercise to your daily routine. Exercise is as good for your health as smoking is bad. As your body rids itself of the effects of smoking, you'll become fitter and better able to exercise. Some persons, in fact, discover pleasure in exercise that serves as a replacement for their smoking habit.

MANAGING YOUR URGES

Urges to smoke, according to some, last about six minutes each. As you're trying to conquer the urge, take out your watch and do deep breathing exercises or engage yourself in some distracting activity until the urge passes. Giving in and smoking a cigarette will only increase the intensity of future urges.

ARE THEY CANCER STICKS? OR HEART ATTACK STICKS?

Lung cancer and emphysema rarely occur in persons not exposed to cigarette smoke. A less recognized but even greater danger to smokers is heart disease.

About a third of deaths attributed to heart disease are associated with smoking. And smoking kills more Americans through heart disease than through lung disorders.

PREGNANT WOMEN: AVOID SMOKE EXPOSURE

Pregnant women are advised to quit smoking. But it's also a good idea for non-smokers to avoid smoke-filled environments during pregnancy.

Studies have demonstrated the health risks of second-hand smoke. Risks to pregnant women include:

- a miscarriage;
- a baby born pre-term or of low birth weight;
- birth of an infant who is vulnerable to death from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Children who breathe second-hand smoke are also vulnerable to SIDS, ear and lung infections and breathing problems such as asthma.

“Quitting smoking is easy, I’ve done it a thousand times.”

- Mark Twain

Did you know that Colon Cancer is one of the leading causes of cancer related deaths in men & women?

Often, the disease can develop with little or no warning. That's why regular screening colonoscopies are such an important tool in detecting this silent killer. At Blue Ridge Digestive Health, Dr. Deborah Levenson is making it easier for you to receive this important screening. From treating irritable bowel, ulcers, pancreatic problems, gall stones, Crohn's Disease, Reflux Disease and much more, Dr. Levenson is ready and able to meet ALL your digestive health needs. As one of the area's only female gastroenterologists, Dr. Levenson has extensive experience treating a broad variety of digestive health disorders using the latest in high definition endoscopic technology. We offer the convenience of office-based colonoscopies and accept most insurance plans.

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