



Valley Youth House

The Digest

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How to Make Your Quit-Smoking Resolution Stick

Quitting smoking is one of the most common New Year's resolutions, but it is easier said than done, with six out of ten smokers requiring multiple attempts before successfully kicking the habit, according to the American Lung Association.

However, preparing a quit-smoking plan can greatly improve your chances of success.

"Quitting smoking is the single most important step smokers can take to improve their health," Dr. Norman Edelman, Chief Medical Officer of the American Lung Association said. "The start of a fresh New Year is a great time for smokers to implement their plan to quit smoking and reap the health and financial benefits of a smoke-free lifestyle."

Here are some proven tips and resources that have helped thousands of people quit smoking:

1. Various types of treatments and different over-the-counter and prescription medications are available to help people quit smoking. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist or visit the American Lung Association website.
2. Pick your quit day a few weeks ahead of time and mark it on the calendar. Try to choose a quit day when you will not be under a great deal of stress. As the day approaches, gather the medications and other quit aids you require and plan how you are going to deal with situations that make you want to smoke.
3. Exercise every day. This will help improve your energy levels and mood, as well as help prevent weight gain. Walking is an ideal way to reduce the stress of quitting. You also need to eat a balanced diet, drink lots of water and get plenty of sleep.
4. Ask for support from family, friends and co-workers and consider joining a stop smoking program so that you do not have to quit alone.

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Could Internet Addiction Disrupt Brain's Connections?

A small Chinese study suggests that the brains of teenagers who are seemingly addicted to the Internet have abnormal "white matter," the biological insulation that surrounds the wiring between neurons. It is not clear if this difference could cause Internet addiction or actually be caused by it. And the research does not point to a treatment or cure for Internet addiction, a controversial diagnosis that the mental health community has not universally accepted.

"Still, the research makes sense because of the regions of the brain in question," said Jonathan Wallis, an Associate Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of California, Berkeley, who studies the brain and is familiar with the new findings. "The areas that they [the study authors] have pinpointed are ones that we already know are involved in addiction and compulsive behavior," he said. The differences in white matter in the subjects described as Internet addicts is "the kind of impairment that we'd expect to disrupt the normal function of those areas."

The existence of Internet addiction is a widely debated issue in the world of mental health, especially since the main handbook of psychological disorders -- the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders -- is undergoing revision. Among other things, specialists disagree over whether the condition is truly an addiction or fits into another category.

Internet addiction has been an especially hot topic in China, where researchers at Jiao Tong University and the Chinese Academy of Sciences launched the new study. The researchers gave MRI brain scans to 17 adolescents who appeared to suffer from Internet addiction. Among other things, the teens said they were preoccupied with the Internet, had repeatedly tried to control their use without success, and felt restless, moody, depressed or irritable when they tried to cut down. The researchers compared their brain scans to those of 16 "healthy" teens of the same ages and genders.

The scientists found that those teens who appeared to have Internet addiction had impaired "white matter" connecting the parts of their brains that deal with issues like decision-making. "White matter refers to the insulation that envelops the wiring that connects brain cells called neurons," Wallis said. "They're connected along the biological equivalent of wire. Just like in any piece of electrical equipment, you want insulation around those wires. The neurons lay down fat, which stops the electrical charge from leaking out of the neuron."

So which came first, the damage to the insulation or the addiction itself? "We don't know whether the poor insulation connecting these areas of the brain predisposes these people to developing compulsive behaviors or whether engaging in a behavior repetitively could damage the connections between brain areas," Wallis said. One possible theory is that the faulty insulation disrupts communication in the brain to the point where a person thinks a behavior is valuable and should be repeated over and over again, Wallis said. That, he added, may be a key to addictions of various types.

"The research offers more insight into how some people may be more prone to addiction because of the way their brains work," said Gordon Harris, a Professor of Radiology at Harvard Medical School who is studying alcoholism and the brain. "It's not just a personal failing or weakness," Harris said. The new study findings appear in the Jan. 11 issue of the journal PLoS One.

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_120702.html

Nicotine Patches, Gums Will Not Help Smokers Quit Long-Term

Nicotine patches and nicotine gum -- the popular mainstays of so-called "nicotine replacement therapy" -- do not help many smokers kick the habit and remain cigarette-free over the long haul, new research suggests.

This conclusion is based on results of several surveys conducted among nearly 800 adult smokers that revealed that those who used nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) did not gain any advantage over non-users in terms of relapse rates. This observation held up among both heavy and light smokers, regardless of whether or not NRT was accompanied by professional cessation counseling.

"Even though other well-controlled studies have shown that NRT can be effective, our study looked at real-world use over the long-term," said study lead author Hillel Alpert, a Research Scientist with the Harvard School of Public Health's Center for Global Tobacco Control in Boston. "And in the real world, cigarettes are simply a very powerful addiction. And NRT is apparently not an effective replacement for that addiction."

Alpert and his colleagues published their findings in the Jan. 9 online edition of *Tobacco Control*. The research was funded by the U.S. National Cancer Institute.

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_120590.html



E-Cigarettes Affect Airways of Smokers Quickly

The electronic cigarettes marketed as a safer alternative to the real thing produce immediate changes in users' airways, a small study suggests. Researchers in Greece saw changes in the lung function of healthy smokers who puffed on an e-cigarette for just five minutes -- although it is not clear what the long-term result of those responses might be in regular e-cigarette users, the team reports in the journal *Chest*.

"E-cigarettes" are battery-powered devices that allow users to inhale a vaporized liquid nicotine solution instead of tobacco smoke. They were designed as a way for smokers to get their nicotine fix without exposing themselves, or other people, to the toxins in tobacco smoke. But some scientists, including officials at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), warn that too many questions remain about the safety of these products. "This is the first evidence that just one (e-cigarette) use can have acute physiologic effects," said Lead Researcher Constantine I. Vardavas, of the Center for Global Tobacco Control at the Harvard School of Public Health.

For the new study, Vardavas and colleagues in Athens had 30 healthy smokers puff on an e-cigarette to see how it affected their airways. The researchers found that after five minutes, users showed signs of airway constriction -- as measured by several types of breathing tests -- and of inflammation. It is not known whether that short-term response could translate into health effects in the long run, including lung diseases like emphysema. "More studies on the long-term effects are needed," Vardavas told Reuters Health. But, he noted, if e-cigarettes trigger airway effects after just a few minutes, that raises concerns about repeated use of the products over time.

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_120507.html

Methamphetamine Linked to Increased Number of Suicide Attempts

Drug users who inject themselves with methamphetamine (meth) are 80 percent more likely to attempt suicide than those abusing other drugs, new research reveals. The magnified risk for meth users is probably rooted in a mixture of social, structural and neurobiological factors, say researchers from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health in New York City and the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. "Compared to other injection drug users, it is possible that methamphetamine users are more isolated and have poorer social support systems," study author and Mailman postdoctoral fellow Brandon Marshall said. Marshall and his colleagues report their findings in the December issue of *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

The team used material from interviews involving nearly 1,900 men and women that were conducted in the Vancouver area over seven years, from 2001 to 2008. The authors note that Vancouver's downtown eastside district is well known as a center for illegal drug use. "This is one of North America's largest cohorts of injection drug users, and the research is among the first longitudinal studies to examine attempts of suicide by injection drug users," stated Marshall (who is also a research coordinator for the Urban Health Research Initiative in British Columbia).

A little more than a third of the participants were women, and another third were of Aboriginal descent. All responded to questions regarding their drug use, treatment experience and risky behaviors with respect to HIV. All told, 8 percent were found to have previously attempted suicide. The authors found that meth injection was linked to a greater risk for suicide attempts across the board. That is, even infrequent meth users bore an elevated risk for attempting suicide, while those who frequently injected meth faced the highest such risk.

"The high rate of attempted suicide observed in this study suggests that suicide prevention efforts should be an integral part of substance abuse treatment programs," Marshall said. "In addition, people who inject methamphetamine but are not in treatment would likely benefit from improved suicide risk assessment and other mental health support services within health care settings."

<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/family-health/brain-and-behavior/articles/2011/12/30/meth-users-much-more-likely-to-try-suicide>

Drug Overdose Kill More Americans Than Car Accidents

More Americans now die from drug overdoses than in car accidents, according to a new government report. In 2008, poisoning deaths became the number one cause of accidental deaths in the United States and the leading cause of injury death in 30 states, according to the report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Ninety percent of these poisonings were linked to drugs, with a surge in deaths from prescription painkiller overdoses reported.

"During the past three decades, the number of drug poisoning deaths has increased six fold, from about 6,000 deaths in 1980 to over 36,500 in 2008," said report author Margaret Warner, an injury epidemiologist at CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, who added that this trend is only expected to continue.

<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/managing-your-healthcare/articles/2011/12/20/drug-overdoses-kill-more-americans-than-car-accidents-cdc>

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Youth Education Program for the Prevention of Destructive Decisions

Public Information Center on Drug Prevention Feedback Survey

Digest

Feedback Survey

Which of the following best reflects your opinion?

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Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! Your views will aid us in improving the quality of the prevention work that we provide to the community. Please return the survey to us in one of the following ways:

Fax it to Elizabeth Torrales at 610-954-5944 or
E-mail to Elizabeth Torrales at etorrales@valleyyouthhouse.org

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