

[IMAGE]

Quitting Smoking is Critical

By Julie T. Chen, MD

Smoking is one of those topics that, whether you are a conventional doctor or an integrative physician or an alternative practitioner, we all agree is not good for someone's health. Just how bad can it be?

Smoking tobacco can raise concerns for increased risks of cancers, hypertension, heart disease, strokes, blood clots, skin age spots, and early wrinkles, just to name a few concerns. So quitting smoking can affect many aspects of your health ranging from your looks such as the health of your skin to the health of your internal organs like your lung and heart.

When we are taught in medical school about helping a patient with quitting smoking, or what we call smoking cessation, we are taught to assess a person's readiness for change. All too often, physicians take on the tactic of simply reprimanding the patient or briefly mentioning a one line of "you should quit" but what is most effective is to help the person understand what they are missing with the continuation of smoking and what they can gain but quitting smoking.

A method called motivational interviewing approaches the person with questions based on curiosity to help the patient achieve an internal understanding of the benefits of quitting smoking on his or her own. This has been proven to be more effective in bringing about habit and lifestyle changes. So, if you have a loved one who is a smoker and you are concerned about its negative impact on health, your best bet in helping him or her quit is to be lovingly persistent in gently broaching the subject in a way where he or she can grasp the benefits of smoking cessation. It would not be helpful to just simply badger the person daily on the topic, I have seen patients respond negatively to that and thus reinforcing their own interest in persisting in smoking.

My recommendation is to help him or her see the positives of quitting by asking what they think they would gain from it. Then, ask him or her what the concerns are about quitting. Once those concerns are delineated, then you can help the person brain storm for ideas as to how to avoid those obstacles or concerns regarding smoking cessation.

Once you or your loved one is ready to quit, you should approach your family members and your doctor for support to help you through the process. People have a higher success rate of being able to quit and staying off the habit if they have the support of those around them...this is true for most lifestyle habit changes.

There are of course many pharmaceutical options to help with smoking cessation these days and you should ask your doctor for assistance because he or she would always be happy to help you achieve this since smoking cessation has a tremendous positive impact on many health parameters your doctor cares about like the diseases I mentioned above.

So, if you are the one wanting to quit smoking...well, the battle is already won because you are at least already at the stage of wanting to quit. Please express this desire to your doctor and your family and friends so they can help you through this. The health benefits will be tremendous.

And, if you are someone with a loved one who smokes but he or she isn't ready to quit...be patient and loving in your approach of wanting them to quit. Try to gently address your concerns with them and start that dialogue of what you could achieve if they weren't smoking...once you have them thinking about all the positives of smoking cessation, you'll have a better chance of getting them a step closer to wanting to quit for themselves.

Dr. Julie T. Chen is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit www.makinghealthyez.com.

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