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## How to Help Someone Quit Smoking

### General hints for friends and family

**Do** respect that the person trying to quit is in charge. This is their lifestyle change and their challenge, not yours.

**Do** ask the person whether they want you to ask regularly how they're doing. Ask how they're feeling – not just whether they've stayed quit.

**Do** let the person know that it's OK to talk to you whenever they need to hear encouraging words.

**Do** help the person who's quitting to get what they need, such as hard candy to suck on, straws to chew on, and fresh veggies cut up and kept in the refrigerator.

**Do** spend time doing things with the person who's quitting to keep their mind off smoking – go to the movies, take a walk to get past a craving (what many call a “nicotine fit”), or take a bike ride together.

**Do** try to see it from the point of view of the person who's quitting – their habit may feel like an old friend who's always been there when times were tough. It's hard to give that up.

**Do** make your home smoke free, meaning that no one can smoke in any part of the house.

**Do** remove all lighters and ash trays from your home. Remove anything that reminds them of smoking.

**Do** wash clothes that smell like smoke. Clean carpets and drapes. Use air fresheners to

help get rid of the tobacco smells – and don't forget the car, too.

**Do** help the person who's quitting with a few chores, some child care, cooking, running errands – whatever will help lighten the stress of quitting.

**Do** celebrate progress along the way. Quitting smoking is a BIG DEAL!

**Do** thank the person who's quitting for not exposing others to harmful secondhand smoke.

**Don't** doubt their ability to quit. Your faith in the person who's quitting helps remind them they can do it.

**Don't** judge, nag, preach, tease, or scold. This may make the person who's quitting feel worse. You don't want your loved one to turn to a cigarette to soothe hurt feelings.

**Don't** take grumpiness personally when the person who's quitting is having nicotine withdrawal. Tell them you understand the symptoms are real and remind them that they won't last forever. The symptoms usually get better in a few weeks.

**Don't** offer advice. Just ask how you can help with the plan or program they are using.

### **If the person who's quitting “slips”**

**Don't** assume that they will start back smoking like before. A “slip” (taking a puff or smoking a cigarette or 2) is pretty common when a person is quitting.

**Do** remind the person who's quitting how long they went without a cigarette before the slip.

**Do** help the person who's quitting remember all the reasons they wanted to quit, and help them forget about the slip as soon as possible.

**Do** continue to offer support and encouragement.

**Do** congratulate the person who's quitting for making a quit attempt, and remind them that it can take many attempts before quitting for good.

**Don't** scold, tease, nag, blame, or make the person who's quitting feel guilty. Be sure they know that you care about them, whether or not they smoke.

## If the person who's quitting relapses

Research shows that most people try to quit smoking several times before they succeed. (It's called a *relapse* when people trying to quit go back to smoking like they were before they tried to quit.) If a relapse happens, think of it as practice for the next time. Don't give up your efforts to encourage and support your loved one. If the person you care about fails to quit or starts smoking again:

**Do** praise them for trying to quit, and for whatever length of time (days, weeks, or months) of not smoking.

**Do** remind them that they didn't fail – they are learning how to quit – and you're going to be there for them the next time and as many times as it takes.

**Do** encourage them to try again. Don't say, "If you try again..." Say, "When you try again..." Studies show that most people who don't succeed in quitting are ready to try again in the near future.

**Do** encourage them to learn from the attempt. Things a person learns from a failed attempt to quit may help them quit for good next time. It takes time and skills to learn to how to be a person who doesn't smoke.

**Do** say, "It's normal to not succeed the first few times you try to quit. You didn't smoke for (length of time) this time. Now you know you can do that much. You can get even further next time." Most people understand this, and know that they have to try to quit again.

## If you smoke and are in contact with someone trying to quit

**Do** smoke outside and always away from the person trying to quit.

**Do** keep your cigarettes, lighters, and matches out of sight. They might be triggers for your loved one to smoke.

**Don't** ever offer the person trying to quit a smoke or any other form of tobacco, even as a joke!

**Do** join your loved one in their effort to quit. It's better for your health and might be easier to do with someone else who is trying to quit, too.

Call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345 to find out what resources might

be available to help someone quit and stay quit.

## Hyperlinks

1. [smokingcessationleadership.ucsf.edu/](http://smokingcessationleadership.ucsf.edu/)

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The American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team  
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Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as journalists, editors, and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

This content has been developed by the American Cancer Society in collaboration with the Smoking Cessation Leadership Center ([smokingcessationleadership.ucsf.edu/](http://smokingcessationleadership.ucsf.edu/))<sup>1</sup> to help people who want to learn about quitting tobacco.

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