To: Local Media  
From: Scott R. Miller, Health Educator  
RE: Tobacco-Free Holidays  
Release Date: December 2013

HOW TO HAVE A TOBACCO-FREE HOLIDAY...AND SURVIVE!

Ten Timely Tips, Tricks, and Tid-bits for Those Trying to Kick the Habit This Holiday

As the holidays draw near, millions of Americans will be preparing for some of the happiest days of the entire year. But for countless others, preparing will go far beyond simply trimming the tree and roasting the turkey. December and January are two of the most common months for people to try to give up using tobacco products, including cigarettes, chew, cigars, and pipes. That means that for some of us, “preparing” will include getting ready to fight the cravings, withdrawals, and triggers that go with the decision to kick the habit.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tell us that most tobacco users begin smoking or chewing before the age of 19, and that 60% of those now using tobacco actually want to quit. And, while the idea of making the next few weeks a “holiday from tobacco” seems like a great way to end the year and usher in a healthier one, the holidays can be especially tough for those working towards that goal. Extra activities, rushing about, traveling, shopping, and finances can easily throw a new quit program off track. To avoid falling back into old habits, experts agree that planning ahead and preparing for the temptations and frustrations to come is the best course of action. To help, here is a list of ten ways you can prepare yourself for a Tobacco-Free Holiday.

1. Be Good To Yourself – Understand that this is a process and it will take time. Your body is used to receiving nicotine and nearly 4,000 other chemicals dozens of times every day. Prepare yourself for feeling jittery, irritable, and most likely very sleepy. To head these feelings off, take time out of your morning every day to breathe, focus, and encourage yourself.

2. Put Yourself First – Sometimes people feel the need to make life easier for everyone but themselves. However it’s important to remember that taking care of yourself does not make you selfish. It makes you better able to help others in the long run. But overextending ourselves at this time of year is always a possibility. Getting stressed out by trying to accomplish too much can lead to cravings. This brings us to #3.
3. **Tell Others** – Don’t go through this alone, and don’t try to keep it a secret. Sometimes those wanting to quit will not tell their family or friends because they don’t want to be embarrassed if they fail, or become the center of attention. But you greatly increase your chances of success if you tell those around you what you are trying to do. That way, they can support you, encourage you, and not unknowingly increase your cravings by smoking around you. Most times, they’ll even ask if there is anything they can do to help. If you think that the amount of holiday prep is going to be stressful, cut down on how much you are trying to do all by yourself. Ask those around you to help with errands and baking and other chores so you don’t feel overly taxed.

4. **Get Some Sleep** – Your body is going through a lot, and it’s going to be achy and cranky. Allow it time to refresh itself. If you’re not getting enough sleep through this process, everything else will suffer. You’ll be able to manage the hectic nature of the holidays, and your quit plan, if you’re getting at least 8 hours each night. (Sneak in as many short “power naps” as you can!)

5. **Drink Extra Water** – Water is vital to keeping our bodies healthy. Without a fresh supply, we feel sluggish and grumpy, achy and tired. Be aware of your water intake, and squeeze more in every day.

6. **Vitamins C & E** – Two of the most important anti-oxidants are vitamins C and E. Cigarette smoke is a toxic blend of chemicals that cause cellular damage and deplete vitamins and minerals in our system. C and E fight off toxins and boost our immune systems. Taking a multivitamin once every day will help ensure you get enough defensive help, especially when many of our holiday foods are delicious, but not necessarily nutritious.

7. **Clean Up** – Not just your body, everything. Wash every piece of clothing that you own. If you can, deep clean your carpets. If you can’t, use carpet deodorizer and vacuum thoroughly. Clean out your car, empty the ashtray, and use a high-quality air freshener. Shampoo the upholstery if you can. Inside the house, wash your window curtains and air out the furniture. Anything you need to do to reduce the smell of tobacco in your home needs to be done. Smell is the number one trigger sense in the body, and removing that subtle suggestion from the brain is going to bring tremendous results.

8. **Dump the Triggers** – While you’re cleaning up, get rid of every ashtray you own. Throw out every lighter, every match, and every extra bit of tobacco you find. There is no reason to have these visual triggers in front of you. And don’t hide them; dump them. Hiding them isn’t going to fool you when you are in the grip of a real craving.

9. **Remember Why** – Remind yourself over and over what your reasons are for wanting to quit. Living longer? Enjoying life? Chasing your grandchildren? Quitting your addiction to nicotine is
not a sacrifice, it’s a gift. You’re moving towards a better, healthier life. Remind yourself of how much better off you will be, how much healthier you’ll feel, and how much money you’ll be saving each month. Write these reasons down and post them where you’ll see them to constantly remind yourself of why you’ve decided to make this positive change in your life.

10. Replace the Craving – This is also known as “resetting your default”, or making a new routine. If you usually smoked at a certain time each day, say after lunch, try replacing that old habit with a new one. Experts recommend chewing on cinnamon or mint-flavored toothpicks. Others suggest replacing a habit that was primarily done out of boredom or repetition with one you actually enjoy. During those times you used to reach for a smoke, take a few minutes to read your favorite magazine instead, or reward yourself with your favorite past time or hobby. Replacing the tobacco with a positive, happy activity will help reprogram your daily routine. Also, if you’re use to smoking the minute the alarm goes off in the morning, try brushing your teeth first; or taking a shower. Change up your entire morning schedule. Avoiding routine is avoiding habit, and habit is usually what keeps people smoking.

These ten ideas may help some of us get through the next several weeks without reaching for a smoke or a chew, but for others it still may not be enough. Remember, even reducing the number of times you use tobacco each day is an incredibly significant victory. Just cutting down can improve a person’s senses of smell and taste overnight. And studies show that if a tobacco-user can go 24 hours without using, they are more likely to give up tobacco entirely.

Tobacco use is the single largest preventable cause of disease and early death in the United States. But about 43.8 million Americans still smoke cigarettes. That’s nearly 1 out of every 5 adults. The American Cancer Society website, www.cancer.org, offers more information and tools, like the Cigarette Cost Calculator, to help make quitting more personal. For advice, local resources, and one-on-one counseling, try calling the Michigan Quit Now help line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

This article was made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for CMDHD’s Together We Can Transform Communities Initiative. 100% of the $1,643,798 Together We Can Transform Communities Initiative fund is financed with Federal funds.

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