

## **Board Perspective: START making the healthy choice to stop smoking**

Barbara Mendenhall, Board President, Winter 2008

The Co-op Board is focusing this year on considering and discussing the Co-op's value of "Support for Healthy Choices" that is expressed by providing healthful products, information about healthy choices and respecting diverse opinions about what is healthy.

Since reading a Guest Commentary in the Sacramento Bee in November, I've been thinking about the Co-op owners, customers and/or staff who are cigarette smokers and how the Co-op can support these dear friends who probably want to quit smoking. In this article I want to pass on information that will be helpful to those who make this healthy choice in their life.

In recent years much has improved for people who want to stop smoking – there are medications that can help and more is known about what works best to improve the odds of successfully quitting.

Our friends don't need convincing that smoking is bad for them. They know that tobacco causes cancer, heart disease and emphysema, among other serious health problems, and that smoking also harms those around them.

Unfortunately, wanting to quit smoking isn't enough to succeed. The enemy is formidable. Nicotine is one of the most addictive substances known to science. Every year, about 40 percent of smokers attempt to kick the habit for at least one day. Most fail. It takes an average of 12 to 14 attempts before a typical smoker quits for good. Frequently it takes a major health scare. Quitting isn't easy, but most smokers who persist eventually succeed.

Former smokers in the United States now outnumber current smokers, and the gap is widening each year. More than 45 million ex-smokers across America provide living proof that it is possible to give up smoking and never look back.

What methods improve the odds of successful smoking cessation? What works when motivation alone isn't sufficient? No single way to quit smoking works for everyone, but one approach is worth a try. Your smoke-free lifestyle begins as you take five simple steps that go by the acronym START:

"S" is for set a quit date. Pick a date that gives you time to get ready but is not so far ahead that you lose your drive to quit. Perhaps you could join others who are quitting at the beginning of this New Year.

"T" is for tell your friends. You're going to need lots of emotional support as you go through nicotine withdrawal. Tell your friends, family members and co-workers that you are planning to quit, and tell them exactly how they can help you succeed.

"A" is for anticipate challenges. Think about when you smoke now and why. What are your triggers for smoking? When the cravings are strong, how will you stay away from things that tempt you to smoke? If you think in advance about how you will cope with the discomfort of nicotine withdrawal, you can improve your chances of staying smoke-free.

"R" is for removing tobacco. Throw away all the cigarettes, matches, lighters, ashtrays and other things around your home, car or workplace that remind you of smoking. Saving a secret pack of cigarettes "just in case" your willpower fails can doom your plan to quit and make it easy to get hooked again. Don't do this!

"T" is for talking to your doctor or health care advisor. Let your health care provider in on your plans. He or she can answer your questions, give specific advice and may suggest treatment such as acupuncture, hypnosis, herbs and medicines that can help with withdrawal.

Your doctor or pharmacist may also suggest where you can find support groups or speak with someone on a toll-free quit line, such as (800) NO-BUTTS.

Your decision to set a quit date and stick to it is the single best choice you can make to improve your health. You can do it. You can win over smoking. And you can START today.

Thank you to Dr. Jason Eberhart-Phillips, El Dorado County's health officer and the Sacramento Bee who published this guest commentary (slightly revised here) on 11/26/07.