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Hypnosis among successful methods for smokers trying to quit

by Linda Theil | News Special Writer

Ashtrays are no longer a staple of home decor, and smokers must huddle in the cold to indulge their habit. Still, on average, two out of every 10 people still are smoking cigarettes.

The fact that cigarettes kill more people than alcohol, AIDS, car crashes, illegal drugs, homicide and suicide combined - not to mention the threat of cancer, emphysema and heart disease - means most smokers want to quit, health officials say.

In Livingston County where half the residents have never smoked and a third have quit smoking, 20 percent of the population struggles with the addiction. Smoking cessation programs - including acupuncture, hypnosis, nicotine replacements, prescription anti-smoking drugs and behavior modification - are widely available. Smokers want to know: Will it work for me?

Dr. Swati Dutta, a radiation oncologist at the St. Joseph Mercy Hospital and the Woodland Cancer Center in Genoa Township, says he strongly encourages patients who are smokers to quit because of the numerous health problems associated with smoking. That list includes heart attacks, strokes, lung problems, cancers, dental problems and fertility issues.

Benefits of quitting

The American Lung Association offers these benefits for smokers who kick the habit:

- After 20 minutes, your heart rate has a favorable response.
- After eight hours, the carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- After two weeks to three months, circulation and lung function improve.
- After one to nine months, coughing and shortness of breath decrease.
- After one year, your risk of having coronary artery disease is half that of a smokers.
- After 15 years your risk of coronary heart disease is similar to that of someone who has never smoked.

He says smokers who come to see her "get a lecture" on the issue.

"Smoking affects everything and goes throughout your body; it can make medical treatment more difficult because of damage to tissues," Dutta says. "It makes delivery of treatment more challenging."

Dutta says many patients can stop smoking with the use of medications, but he also **encourages patients to try hypnosis.**

Howell hypnotist Curtis Watkins says he has an 85 percent to 90 percent success rate with his smoking-cessation efforts in his 25 years of practice in Livingston County. Many local physicians send him patients who want to quit smoking.

"One of the best ways (to quit smoking cigarettes) is through hypnosis," Watkins says. "But however you get off of 'em, you gotta get off them. It comes down to positive thinking - letting that mind work for you and not against you. When you're smoking, you're using your mind against you, and it can cost you your life."

Watkins offers group sessions of eight to 10 people, where he explains the process of hypnosis, answers questions, hypnotizes his clients and gives them a reinforcing CD to use at home (details on the Web at how2elearn.com/watkinshypnosis).

"You have to want to get off cigarettes," Watkins says.

He offers this advice to those who have made the choice to quit:

Set a date and know that you are never going to smoke again.

Tell yourself, "This is it! I'm going to get off these things. I'm going to be happy. I'm going to be successful and move forward with a positive attitude."

Remember the six most important words in your life: As you think, so you are.

Whatever method you choose to quit, help is as close as your doctor, the Internet, or a call to the Michigan Quit Line at 1-800-480-QUIT (7848).

Freelance writer Linda Theil is a former three-pack-a-day smoker who found success with a Curtis Watkins group session in 1999 and has not smoked since.