

Help is available when giving the gift of quitting smoking

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EDMOND — With the upcoming holidays, the new year is a great time to make a resolution to kick the habit. Reiterate to family and friends that you will be there to support them throughout the year and throughout the quitting process.

"Quitting smoking is the greatest gift you can give yourself," said Edmond Mayor Dan O'Neil, who is celebrating his 16th anniversary of quitting smoking.

When making the decision to give the gift of quitting smoking this holiday season, remember the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline is ready to help, when you're ready to quit.

Statewide surveys have shown that four out of five adult smokers in Oklahoma are interested in quitting smoking.

"The Helpline is available to provide free services to help Oklahomans quit tobacco. As we work together to reduce tobacco use in Oklahoma County, spreading the news about the Helpline is one of the most important things we can do," said Suzanne Barnett, Central Oklahoma Turning Point Tobacco Use Prevention Coalition coordinator.

"The Central Oklahoma Turning Point Tobacco Use Prevention Coalition is encouraging all smokers and other tobacco users in Oklahoma County to take advantage of the free cessation services available through the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline at 1-800-Quit Now (784-8669)."

The Helpline provides free professional cessation assistance through a series of telephone coaching or counseling sessions with a Helpline specialist. Callers enrolled in the Helpline program work with the same specialist throughout their quitting process to develop and work through a personalized quit plan based on their individual needs. The Helpline's hours of operation are 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. seven days a week. Helpline staff will return any messages left after hours.

Ways you can help a loved one stop smoking:

- Remember that deciding to quit is very personal. If a smoker you love is thinking of quitting but does not seem ready to commit, it will not help to badger or nag the person. It may help to talk openly and honestly about smoking and why he or she wants to quit. Let your loved one know that when the time comes, you will be there with your support.
- Understand that quitting takes planning. As your loved one prepares to quit, help him or her think through the process. Talk about the potential challenges. Make a list of reasons it is important to quit. Help your loved one learn the most effective ways to quit, and discuss the resources that are available to help.
- Be "on call." Show your support by asking your friend or family member to call you when a cigarette craving strikes. You can be a great short-term distraction. Remember that most cravings pass within 15 minutes. Come up with some new activities your friends can use to make it through a rough spot. You also can identify the time of day your loved one usually smokes for the first time. Call every day at that time for the first week so he or she has something else to look forward to.
- Be a source of encouragement. Quitting smoking takes constant work, commitment and energy. Tell your loved one you recognize the dedication and that you're proud of the effort. Let your loved one know how well he or she is doing and find ways to celebrate each accomplishment.
- Be understanding. Quitting is difficult, and it can make people grouchy and irritable. Be patient with your loved one. If a slip should occur and your friend should smoke a cigarette or two, do not be disappointed. Keep up the encouragement and do not let him or her get discouraged. On average it takes former smokers eight to 11 tries to quit for good. Let your loved one know that you'll be there when they are ready to try again.