Helping a Smoker Quit: Do's and Don'ts

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General hints for friends and family

Do respect that the quitter 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 quitter 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 try to see it from the smoker's point of view – a smoker's habit may feel like an old friend that has 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. Remove lighters and ash trays from your home.

Do help the quitter with a few chores, some child care, cooking – whatever will help lighten the stress of quitting.

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

Don't doubt the smoker's ability to quit. Your faith in them reminds them they can do it.

Don't judge, nag, preach, tease, or scold. This may make the smoker feel worse about him or herself. You don't want your loved one to turn to a cigarette to soothe hurt feelings.

Don't take the quitter's grumpiness personally during their nicotine withdrawal. Tell them that you understand the symptoms are real and remind them that they won't last forever. The symptoms usually get better in about 2 weeks.

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

Source: American Cancer Society

If your ex-smoker "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 quitter how long they went without a cigarette before the slip.

Do help the quitter remember all the reasons they wanted to quit, and help them forget about the slip as soon as possible.

Don't scold, tease, nag, blame, or make the quitter feel guilty. Be sure the quitter knows that you care about them whether or not they smoke.

If your quitter relapses

Research shows that most people try to quit smoking several times before they succeed. (It's called a relapse when smokers go back to smoking like they were before they tried to quit.) If a relapse happens, think of it as practice for the 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 your loved one that they didn't fail – they are learning how to quit – and you're going to be there for them the next time.

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 be a non-smoker.

Do say, "It's normal to not succeed the first few times you try to quit. Most people understand this, and know that they have to try to quit again. 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."