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Smoking: Quitters often relapse

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ing to happen years down the line," said Pat Cookson, a volunteer at the Eugene chapter of the American Cancer Society. "The combination of information has been heard so much that it doesn't target youth — they tune it out."

A 1996 University of Michigan study found teen smoking had increased to its highest level in 16 years. Of the 46 million adults who smoke, the average smoker started at age 13 and became a daily smoker after a year and a half.

But the popularity of the Great American Smokeout has increased as well. The percentage of smokers who reported quitting or reducing cigarette intake for one day has risen from 18 percent in 1995 to 26 percent in 1996.

There are numerous methods to assist smokers in quitting. Besides the Nicoderm patch and Nicorette gum, acupuncture and hypnosis also have become popular.

"It works for a lot of people in my practice," explained Tom Williams, a Eugene acupuncturist. "Word of mouth is how many find out about it. Smokers socialize with other smokers, and they tell their friends."

Acupuncture has a detoxifying effect on the body and can help calm anxiety that drives any addiction or compulsive behavior, he said. But most people have to want to quit to be successful.

"Addiction is complex," said Joanne Frank, director of health education at the Student Health Center. "Maybe people are seek-

ing alternative modes that work for them on an individual basis."

Many of these methods may not be as successful for young people, she said. Older adults are better candidates for smoking-cessation classes because they have had more life experiences with related illnesses or have gone through the cycle of smoking and quitting repeatedly, she added.

Some students do not believe in smoking-cessation treatments such as the patch or nicotine gum. Matt Mitchell, who quit smoking more than eight months ago, admits he's a nicotine addict who chooses not to smoke.

"The patch and gum draw out the process of quitting much longer than it needs to be," he said. "You have to choose not to smoke — ever."

One of the most difficult aspects of quitting is changing your identity as a smoker, Frank said. Smokers tend to identify themselves with the habit, and it becomes more than a daily routine.

"Cigarettes take on an identity of its own, different for each smoker," she explained.

In smoking cessation classes, smokers learn that cigarettes give them a sense of power or take the place of friends. They not only relieve stress, but also become a comfort in times of need.

"You have to realize that you are not a package of cigarettes — you are who you are on the inside," Frank said. "Smokers should not be discouraged if they fail to quit successfully the first time. Relapse is a reality."

Cessation tips

WAYS TO HELP YOU QUIT OR REDUCE SMOKING:

- Decrease the number of cigarettes smoked per day or postpone the first cigarette you smoke by an hour each day.
- Make it difficult to access cigarettes by wrapping your pack in tin-foil or rubber bands.
- Change your brand — often.
- Exercise: it's good for relaxation.
- If you smoke with coffee, switch to tea or juice.

TIPS FOR THE DAY YOU QUIT:

- Throw your pack, lighter and ashtray away.
- Get your teeth cleaned to remove tobacco stains.
- Estimate how much money you'll save.
- Keep busy (do your homework).

COMMON SOLUTIONS TO WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS:

- Headaches: Relax. Take a warm shower or bath, and practice breathing techniques.
- Insomnia (trouble sleeping): Don't drink caffeine after 6 p.m.
- Hunger: Drink water or low-calorie liquids and chew hard foods.
- Coughing: Drink herbal tea or suck on cough drops. Try to use a humidifier or steam hot water with a towel over your head.

SOURCE: Student Health Center and the American Cancer Society

Habit: Parents get gift they always wanted

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my lungs — all for the same low price.

They called me "chimney" in high school for having the amazing ability to smoke seven cigarettes in one sitting, and I was often caught with more than one cigarette lit at a time.

Almost all my friends laughed when I told them I had quit — again. They still had vivid images of me smoking with the Nicoderm patch from last time. They claimed I used that initial cigarette to jump start the patch and activate the ingredients.

But when I was informed this summer that I had the warning signs of pulmonary emphysema, I knew my smoking days were numbered. So I enrolled in the smoking cessation class at the Student Health Center and opened my mind to the life of a non-smoker.

I knew it would be hard to quit. I liked a cigarette when I walked between classes, after dinner, while I was driving, when I had coffee, when I had a beer, when I had a conversation with a friend, after turning in a paper, before I went to bed and when I was studying at the library. I wasn't scared of withdrawal, I was scared of not being able to live through with quitting.

My parents could never understand why I smoked in the age of enlightenment, with so much medical evidence pointing to the harms of smoking. I had heard the hype and never really cared. I always yawned and told them I would quit when I wanted to do so. Then I realized that day would never come.

Nobody wants to give up an addiction that brings them pleasure, but sometimes we know we have to quit. I am not the Bionic Woman and unfortunately, I was not born with extra lungs.

But my week of quitting wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. In fact, not smoking is something I've gotten used to doing. I am not claiming that I was perfect; everyone has a weakness.

I had two cigarettes Friday night and two more Monday. But I consider that an improvement compared to the 20-plus I used to suck down daily.

You don't know what to do with your hands at first — I chose to bite my fingernails, which is what I did anyway when I was in class or unable to smoke. But if you keep busy, you don't worry about it too much.

The patch and eating quelled the cravings. Yes, my daily intake of a latte per day and a pack of menthols was replaced by breakfast (eggs, bacon and toast) and dinner. But I'm not worried about gaining pounds. Lots of my friends who quit told me they lost the extra weight after a month or two when their metabolisms returned to normal.

Coughing up that black lung was a problem. My voice, usually raspy from the pack-a-day plan, is still just as bad. I cough a lot now that I quit, but health authorities assure me that will pass in time. Until then, I have fun spitting and trying to identify the shapes.

At first I could smell someone smoking anywhere in my presence, and I began noticing people smoking all over campus. But I just reminded myself that they were walking body bags and I would survive.

The real test is with your friends. I realized that almost all of them smoked, and I couldn't stop them or keep them from teasing me for quitting. But I didn't want them to hide their habits from me. Temptation is found in daily life, and nobody can shield you from it, so it is best to take the tests one at a time.

Becoming a non-smoker changed my identity. There was a whole ritual that I was exempted from in daily life. People can't bum from me on the streets, even though I still rummage through my bag to find my missing pack.

Quitting did give me more energy. I wasn't huddled under overhangs with my comrades trying to light a cig while the wind and rain whipped around me. I didn't have to get up in the middle of a movie to venture outdoors for a smoke break. I tried going to the gym, but all those Nautilus machines and gym fanatics scared me more than a black lung. So I'll take it one step at a time to modify my lifestyle.

When I was smoking, I knew no matter what that I would scrape up enough change to at least buy Dorals, GPCs or Dave's cigarettes. So money was never an issue, and it doesn't play an important role now. I needed cigarettes and would get them any way possible — even using my credit card if I was desperate. I haven't noticed that I'm saving money yet, but maybe after a month my ATM account will thank me.

I feel better now that I quit smoking. I don't have the guilt looming over me that I am inhaling a bad habit, and I can give my parents the Christmas present they've dreamed about for the last five years: a healthy child who won't die before they do.

Any way a smoker can quit is a good way. I never believed in meditation or acupuncture, but I will try them. When my friends believed I was serious, their support and recognition kept me focused.

But, more than anything else, the challenge of winning kept me from smoking. I don't like to lose anything — especially my life.

So if I want to fight Camel Joe or the Marlboro Man, I am going to kick their butts.