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We are all aware of the health dangers of smoking, and there is no doubt this awareness has led to a reduction in the numbers of people smoking. Even so, if you are a smoker there are a number of things you can do to improve your chance of successfully giving up. Quitting is one of the best health measures you can take and there are immediate health benefits for people with smoking-related diseases.

Quitting smoking can be challenging but if you are determined to do it, you can. So what would be your motivator? Consider this, tobacco smoke is made up of 4,000 chemicals and many gases. Nicotine is the most addictive chemical. It causes the blood vessels in your body to narrow, making it harder for blood to flow around. This raises your blood pressure, strains your heart and results in health problems that can affect your enjoyment of life, now and later on. Carbon monoxide gas starves your body of oxygen so that your heart has to work harder, adding extra strain. Tar contains substances that cause cancer.

There is no glamour in cigarette smoking and what it does to the body. It can irritate the eyes, nose, throat and lower respiratory tract. Diseases of the lungs, especially asthma, are made worse by smoking, and smokers are at high risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease which causes permanent lung damage and eventually is fatal. Smoking increases the risk of developing cancers of the lung, throat and mouth, of blood clots that can lead to heart disease or stroke and poor blood circulation that can lead to limb amputation.

Never think it is too late to give up. Even if you have tried many times before, give it another go. It can take many attempts to become completely smoke free, and this time you could be successful. There are many individuals and organisations that can assist and encourage you.

Your Doctor or Quitline (0800 778 778) can provide Quit cards that you can take to your pharmacy to exchange for a course of patches, gum or lozenges and these are subsidised by the government. Some nicotine replacement products can be used to help people to reduce the number of cigarettes smoked before actually quitting.

As an alternative, Zyban and Champix tablets work in the brain to reduce the cravings for nicotine. These tablets are taken for 8 to 12 weeks and you continue to smoke during the first two weeks. Gradually the satisfaction of smoking reduces over the two weeks to the point where you find no pleasure in smoking. Both are now available as a subsidised medicine with a prescription from your doctor. Champix is the newer product and has a quit rate of about 40% which, while not a guarantee, is still much better than other options (at ~20-30%).

Certain foods may also help you quit. Celery, courgettes and cucumbers contain properties that may decrease nicotine dependence. The carcinogens in cigarettes inhibit absorption of many nutrients, particularly calcium. Long-term smokers should eat plenty of calcium-rich food such as oranges, broccoli, salmon and almonds to avoid bone density issues later in life.

The advantages of staying smoke free are so many that once you have quit, you will never want to return to your old habits. Do change your routine to suit your new smoke free life, with new hobbies, new rewards or comforts and new ways to enjoy life. Plan healthy snacks for yourself and develop new ways to deal with stress and relax. Prepare yourself before returning to risky places, people or activities. And finally, be proud of yourself as a non-smoker.

May 31st is World Smoke Free Day – give quitting a go, you can do it! Come in and talk to me about nicotine replacement products or prescription medicines and which will be most suitable for you. You can register for nicotine replacement products and receive support information in store. We look forward to helping you through your quitting journey.