



# HOW TO HELP YOUR friend quit smoking

MYAT MOE KHAING

I am one of those people who will walk ten steps away as soon as someone lights a cigarette. The smoke causes me headache and at times even nausea. But things are worse for those at the other end of the smoke, especially those who are trying to quit smoking. Our genuine concern for them and that we will support them regardless of whether they choose to continue smoking or not are the first messages that need to be conveyed. There is no best way to quit smoking. While they're struggling with it, we, as friends, can come in handy with the right information and support.

#### WHY YOU?

A friend of mine once let me know of his decision to quit smoking. He seemed nervous. All that he wanted was help, though it was not clear what exactly he expected me to do. However, being reached out to made me feel closer to him.

It is important to understand the kind of friendship you have with them that helps you set your boundaries.

#### WHY THEM?

The reasons to quit smoking vary from person

to person. Maybe it's the health concern or maybe the idea of having a limit to an addiction. Or maybe, it's an emotional thing. If someone tells you "I'm thinking of quitting smoking", embrace the idea with zero judgement.

If you are an ex-smoker, you can draw from your own experience of quitting. Ask your friend to write down the reasons why he/she wants to quit smoking. This helps them contemplate their decision. If they decide that they are not yet ready to give up smoking, it is really important to respect their decision. Assure them of your help and support when they decide that they are ready to try.

However, they must quit smoking



for themselves; they cannot do it for us. Otherwise, a sense of self-deprivation is created, which grows with each challenge and guarantees defeat.

#### GETTING STARTED

It is important to set a date to give up smoking. How else can we celebrate anniversaries of our right decisions? Encourage them to pick a date when they are not under too much pressure, and it is really important that they stick to the date! A smoking diary can document the plan to quit. This will help the smoker to become aware of their smoking habit by identifying when and where they most feel like smoking. It can be the basis of how to go through those times without smoking.

#### ACTUALLY QUITTING

The drill is to take one day at a time. Essentials need to be ticked off the list. Regular exercise, plenty of sleep and improved food habit are a must.

While you encourage your friends, arrange your social activities at places where they can't smoke; lighters and



ashtrays better be out of the way. Ask how they are feeling, not just whether they have managed to quit.

Playing sports, taking a walk, playing with puppies are all good distractions. Put together a "quitting kit" with a few items, such as chewing gum. Some triggers and cravings are unavoidable. Help your friend or family member prepare by thinking of ways to distract themselves until the craving passes. Most cravings only last a few minutes, so making a short phone call or finding a task to keep them busy might be enough.

#### LECTURES ARE BORING

Smokers are as aware of health risks associated with smoking just as we are, if not more. Reminding them of

what smoking is doing to their body might even make them feel that we are judging them. Lectures, nagging, and scolding will not help your friend to quit smoking.

Counting the number of cigarettes they smoked can be stressful for them. It's normal to have a bigger appetite from withdrawal. Often nicotine withdrawals make a person moody. Supporting someone who is trying to quit smoking can be frustrating and exhausting. It's important to not let their moods affect you personally. Saying it was easier to put up with their moods when they were smoking can ruin every effort made so far. Instead, suggest sitcoms and games to uplift their mood.

#### CELEBRATE SUCCESSES, BIG AND SMALL

Staying smoke-free for one day, one week, or one year are all reasons to celebrate. So are throwing out all of the ashtrays in the house, ditching any reminder of cigarettes, and passing on an after-dinner cigarette. A compliment on how they look can go a long way.

#### BE EASY

The challenges of quitting smoking don't end when a person puts down their last cigarette. While the worst of it will have passed in the first few weeks, they may let their guard down after a while. That's when the cravings may rear up to cause them to slip back once more. Be sure to stay in contact with your friend and find out how they are coping with quitting. When smokers go back to smoking while trying to quit, it is called "relapse". In that case, think of it as practice for the next time. We can always praise them for trying to quit, "You didn't smoke for two weeks. Now you know you can do that; you can get even further next time."

When/if your friend or family member slips at some point and smokes a cigarette, they will likely feel guilty. Taking a puff or two is pretty common when a person is trying to quit. Help them come up with a plan for dealing with the craving if it happens again.

Quitting smoking is about them, not you. This is their life choice and their challenge, not yours. Quitting is NOT an easy process. Supporting someone on that journey is not easy either, but it can make things less difficult.

Myat Moe is an occasional philosopher whose favourite pastime is confusing people with her nationality. Reach her @15michelle@gmail.com

