

Harbinger's Column

by Sue Kaiser



Harbinger is York University's peer counselling and referral service. Drop in at 214 Vanier residence, or phone 667-3059 - 3632. Open 10 am - 6 pm, Monday to Friday.

A single drop kills!

New Year's is a time of resolutions for many people, and many will be trying to quit smoking. Here are some basics about smoking and nicotine which may heighten your determination to quit, and also some practical suggestions to increase your chance of success.

Nicotine is a poison, a single drop of which can kill an adult if it is injected into the blood stream. The pleasing lift that is associated with smoking is the result of the body's attempt to get rid of this poison. When nicotine enters the blood stream, the heartbeat accelerates. This results in an increased blood flow and a rise in blood pressure. More oxygen and energy is furnished to the body cells to break down the toxic elements in nicotine, and eliminate them as quickly as possible.

The blood vessels in the peripheral areas constrict to limit the spreading of the poison. Circulation is slowed and body temperature drops as a result. As body stimulation slows down, the smoker feels a sense of relaxation.

Nicotine also increases the secretion of acid in the stomach, and dulls the appetite. Senses of smell and tastes are deadened. The body's tolerance for nicotine increases with habit, and the tendency is to increase the amount smoked over a period of time.

The effects of smoking on health are fairly well known by most people. Smoking is known to increase susceptibility to lung cancer, and cancer of the larynx, mouth and esophagus. Smokers have a higher incidence of colds and respiratory infections than the population at large. They have a higher risk of coronary heart disease and heart attacks, and a higher death rate from vascular diseases (hardening of the blood vessels and clots).

Smoking is an important cause of chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Pregnant women who smoke are more likely to have small babies and premature births. They also have a greater number of still-births or deaths at birth. This prenatal effect may occur because the constriction

of the blood vessels by nicotine reduces the blood and oxygen flow to the fetus.

Many smokers say they would like to quit, but dread the discomfort of the withdrawal period. More help is now available to anyone wishing to quit.

The most common source of help for those wishing to stop is the smokers' clinic. Such groups provide support for and reinforcement of the individual's decisions to stop smoking. The first step is to analyse your smoking habits: what time of day and what situations are associated with smoking.

When you know something about these patterns, you are better prepared to try and break out of the smoking habits. If cigarettes are associated with coffee and alcohol, then these should be avoided for awhile. Quitting day should be on a weekend or holiday, or at some time when demands and pressures are low, and when daily routines don't remind you of coffee and cigarette breaks. Activity is very important, since boredom often leads to thoughts of smoking. Do puzzles, start hobbies, do whatever activities that will keep you interested until the urge to smoke weakens.

It takes about a week to rid the body of its physical addiction to nicotine. Cold showers give your body a lift, and help increase circulation. Exercise helps distract you from thoughts of smoking, and also aids circulation. Large amounts of fluids in the first few days of quitting help flush the nicotine residue from the body and end the physical addiction.

For those who do not wish to stop, there are some ways to reduce the danger to your health. Cigars and pipes are less harmful than cigarettes, since their smoke is not inhaled. If you must smoke cigarettes, smoke only half. (Nicotine concentration in the second half of a cigarette is much higher.)

Try to reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke each day.

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