

Thursday, July 22, 2010

Kick The Butt! - Issued in public interest by Smoke free Mumbai Campaign

Publication: www.prlog.org, Edition: Internet, Journalist: Bureau

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Mumbai, 21st July: Smoking is one of the major causes of death and disability in India. Cigarette smoking is the primary cause of lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, and a major risk factor for coronary heart disease. It is also the primary cause of chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Each year more than nine lakh individuals between the age group 25-69 die of smoking. By 2010, this figure could cross the one million mark. In a country with at least 30 million smokers, the problem assumes epidemic proportions.

A report by the World Health Organization states that India is home to 12 per cent of the world's smokers. And the smoking population seems to increase with each passing year. While the smoking population is on the rise, only a negligible number of smokers are quitting the habit every year.

Statistics reveal that in India, quitting smoking is a rare phenomenon with only two per cent of adults showing the determination to kick the butt compared to 40 per cent in the US or Europe. Most smokers find it difficult to quit smoking because of the addictive nature of nicotine. Nicotine withdrawal can cause unpleasant side effects such as nicotine cravings, fatigue, irritability, aggressiveness, anxiety, mood swings, headaches and sleeping difficulties, which will make them unpleasant to be around.

Since most smokers pick up the habit at an early age, quitting the habit becomes even more difficult. This apart, cessation efforts is one of the most neglected areas in curbing the use of tobacco in the country. These are only some of the major reasons why it is hard to quit smoking. But there are also several strategies and quitting techniques that may aid smokers to finally give up on this tenacious habit.

There are various therapies that can help a tobacco addict avoid relapse of the addiction, and result in some of the highest long-term abstinence rates from tobacco. One of the therapies that had gained importance in the last few years is Nicotine Replacement Therapy and the use of chewing gums. To overcome cravings and strengthen the positive goal of becoming healthy, a great trick is to drink a glass of water very slowly when a craving hits. Apart from these therapies and tricks, a visit to smoking cessation clinic with psychological and medicinal support can yield positive results.

Dr Shastri, HOD Preventive Oncology, Tata Memorial Hospital, who also leads the SmokeFree Mumbai campaign opines that quitting smoking can be achieved successfully, provided the determination to quit is strong along with the involvement of psychological counseling and various therapies. Dr. Shastri says, "Smoking is only about 10 per cent physical addiction and 90 per cent psychological addiction. Therefore, smokers must understand that quitting smoking takes more than one attempt. They must also try several methods before they can finally succeed. With determination, will power and an effective strategy, smokers can quit the habit. Smoking cessation represents the single most important step that smokers can take to enhance the length and quality of their lives. Education and awareness play a vital role in curbing the scourge of smoking."

While quitting smoking is no easy task, Dr Shastri points out that the benefits of quitting smoking are far reaching. According to him, within 20 minutes of kicking the habit, the blood pressure returns to normal, carbon monoxide levels return to normal within eight hours. Blood circulation improves after two months and the chance of a heart attack is cut in half after one year.

Further, quitting smoking reduces the risk of cancer and other diseases such as cardiovascular and respiratory disease caused by smoking. People who quit smoking, regardless of their age, are less likely than those who continue to smoke to die from smoking-related illnesses.

If you are smoker, quit today. If you are not a smoker, don't start it.

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The Smoke free Mumbai campaign was launched on February 20, 2009 by the Action Council against Tobacco-India (ACT-India) along with partners, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, Tata Memorial Hospital, Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, Salaam Bombay Foundation, Cancer Patients Aid Association, and V-CARE, to ensure the implementation of the national legislation passed on October 2, 2008 for smoke-free public places. The key objectives of the campaign are to ensure compliance with the existing national law, monitor violations and mobilize support from stakeholders, i.e., policy makers, organizations and civil society. For further details on the campaign, visit www.smokefreemumbai.org