



Smoke Signals

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Remember the Date: Nov. 17, 2005

How the Great American Smokeout Began

The Smokeout has helped bring about dramatic changes in Americans' attitudes about smoking, which have led to community programs and smokefree laws that are now saving lives in many states. The event began in the 1970s when smoking and secondhand smoke were commonplace. The idea for the Great American Smokeout grew out of a 1974 event. Lynn R. Smith, editor of the Moticello Times in Minnesota, spearheaded the state's first D-Day, or Don't Smoke Day. The idea may have been inspired by Arthur P. Mullaney of Randolph, Massachusetts, who three years earlier had asked people to give up cigarettes for a day and donate the money they would have spent on cigarettes to a high school scholarship fund.

The idea caught on, and on November 18, 1976, the California Division of the American Cancer Society successfully prompted nearly one million smokers to quit for the day. That California event marked the first Smokeout, and the Society took it nationwide in 1977.

Each year, the Great American Smokeout also draws attention to the deaths and chronic diseases caused by smoking. And throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, many state and local governments responded by banning smoking in workplaces and restaurants, raising taxes on cigarettes, limiting advertising, discouraging teen cigarette use, and taking further actions to counter smoking.

Those states with strong tobacco control laws are now reaping the fruits of their labor. They have markedly lower smoking rates and fewer people dying of lung cancer, according to a 2003 report in *Cancer Causes and Control*.

That study found lung cancer death rates among adults age 30-39 were lower and falling in most states that had a strong antitobacco program. In states with weak tobacco control, lung cancer rates were higher and climbing.

Today, an estimated 46 million US adults smoke. Tobacco use can cause lung cancer, as well as other cancers, heart disease, and lung disease. Smoking is responsible for 1 in 3 cancer deaths, and 1 in 5 deaths from all causes. Another 8.6 million people are living with serious illnesses caused by smoking.

Fortunately, the past 27 years have seen tremendous strides in changing attitudes about smoking, in understanding the addiction, and in learning how to help people quit.

“Just One Little Puff?”

It is hard for many people to grasp the concept of how just one little puff can result in full-blown relapse. It just doesn't seem logical to some people. But should you ever find yourself debating the thought of whether or not you could possibly get away with smoking “just” one, think about what advice you would give to a family member or friend who you cared for tremendously, while knowing that they were a recovering heroin or cocaine addict who was for the first time in months or years considering attempting recreational use. Imagine your shock and horror at even the thought of it, especially if you were with them back during the peak of their addiction when it was ruining almost every aspect of life and maybe even putting his or her very life on the line.

Would you say to him or her, “well, maybe you are better now, maybe its worth finding out if you could handle just one?” Would you feel the need to do a little research in current journals to see if maybe “one” is an option now?

It is more likely that you would you cut through the rationalization and say, “If you do it, you are going to be back where you were when you first had to quit. You are going to mess up your life and everyone around you. The odds are you would go the latter route. You would be horrified and take a firm stand that he or she shouldn't do it — it would be stupid and even worse, suicidal.

It will be the loss of your quit, and that can easily translate into loss of your health and eventually loss of your life. You have to be vigilant at all times, to keep reminding yourself that you are a recovering addict. Over time there may be no signs of the addiction; thoughts of cigarettes may have become rare events now and maybe even nonexistent. But even at this stage of the game, there is a silent addiction still there that can take you down with full force for making one miscalculation — thinking that maybe you are different. You are no different than any other drug addict, whether the drug was alcohol, cocaine, heroin, etc. You are an addict for life, but as long as you get the drug out of your system and never administer it again, you will never be set into the downward spiral that the drug sets into motion to its users.

To keep what you've got, always remember that to stay smoke free you must **NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!**