

They Are Just Excuses!

By Gayle North

"Smoking an extra five years, 10 months, or even a few weeks carries a potential risk. You just don't know which cigarette may be the one to initiate an irreversible process, such as cancer or a fatal heart attack or stroke. Every day you puff, these risks remain high."

- Joel Spitzer, leading authority on smoking cessation and prevention programs and author of the book, *Never Take Another Puff*

Many newcomers to this area often comment on the seemingly high number of people here who smoke and use chewing tobacco. Maybe it's because smoking is allowed in more public places here than in other states and it's just more visible. I've been doing some research into smoking in Montana. Here are some interesting statistics.

Montana Tobacco Users Would Like To Quit! A big percentage (45%) of the adult cigarette smokers tried to quit smoking in 2002 – 47.9% and 42% respectively females and males. Montana youth also try to quit smoking cigarettes. In 2003, three of five (61%) of high school students who smoke, reported that they tried to quit in the past 12 months.

A Few Tobacco Statistics: The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids estimates that more Montanans die each year from tobacco-related diseases than from car accidents, alcohol, drugs, AIDS, suicide, and murders combined. If these tobacco-related deaths were easy and comfortable, it wouldn't be so bad, but the fact is that most of these diseases seriously interfere with the quality of life and many people suffer for years before they die and it always causes hardship for their loved ones as well. Tobacco is also the single most preventable cause of death and disease in our society.

Medical expenses for tobacco-related diseases for patients in Montana total over 216 million per year. Think of the suffering caused to families just by the expenses of medical care for their loved ones.

19% of all women delivering babies in Montana smoked (in 2002) throughout their pregnancy. This is one of the saddest statistics from my point of view because it is no longer just a "low birth weight" issue. A number of other negative effects on the unborn child have been verified. The emotional guilt and feelings of helplessness experienced by these women has to be painful as well. Nurses in the Obstetrics Department of the Kalispell Regional Medical Center told me that they think the percentage is much higher than 19% in their hospital.

23% of high school students admit to current cigarette smoking according to a survey of Montana's schools in 2003. The same survey shows that 13% of 7th and 8th graders smoke cigarettes. It is estimated that Montana kids buy 3.9 million packs of cigarettes each year. That's over 15 million dollars per year spent on cigarettes.

All of the above statistics are approximately double for the American Indian population.

With all the evidence available about the debilitating effects of tobacco and the cost of the habit, what stops people from just stopping? The bottom line is excuses.

Adult Smokers' (& Chewers) Excuses.

Excuses can seem very real and overpowering to the tobacco user. Excuses overshadow their real fears and the fact that they feel smaller than their habit. These are just a few of the excuses I hear from clients:

"I need to smoke because my of my stressful ____ (job, relationship, etc.)" Most smokers notice that they smoke the same number of cigarettes whether they are on vacation, enjoying peaceful relationships, etc. In other words most people smoke approximately the same number of cigarettes no matter what is going on in their life. Cigarettes do not ease stress they only distract temporarily from the feeling. It's just an excuse.

"I smoke to relax." Nicotine is a stimulant. It does not help people relax. Do you know any chain smoker who is relaxed? If tobacco helped people relax, chain smokers would be the most relaxed people. The sense of relaxation comes from taking a break from your activity and from the deep breathing. These things can be done - one could truly relax without the cigarette

"I need it to think clearly." Nicotine stimulates the body and gives a temporary sense of clarity. Recent research, however, shows that intelligence is actually dulled by smoking. In a British study that tested 465 peoples' intelligence in 1947 (at 11 years old) - and then again in 2000-2002 (at 65 years old), smokers performed significantly worse on cognitive tests than the non-smokers and former smokers.

"I don't have the will power." Every day people do a lot of things they don't want to do. Most people wouldn't go to work some days if they didn't have will power. The question is, do they want to use their will power to stop smoking?

"I enjoy smoking. " Most people smoke unconsciously – they don't really enjoy each cigarette they smoke. They mostly don't enjoy not smoking. Even if they enjoy 3 or 4 cigarettes during the day, and each cigarette takes 4 minutes to smoke, that is 16 minutes of enjoyment. They are putting up with all the negative effects on their health and spending all that money for 16 minutes of enjoyment a day.

"My cigarette is my friend." How do you feel about a friend who has to go *everywhere* with you? A friend stinks and when he's with you - people think you both stink - A friend who will make you go out in a blizzard or in the middle of the night to pick him up at the store - A friend who makes you pay him from \$5 to \$15 a day for his company - A friend who does not want you to be healthy and keeps you from participating in physical activities – A friend who helps you catch colds and flu – a friend that carries thousands of poisons with him and sneaks them to you – a friend that wants to see you slowly crippled with diseases – like emphysema – he really likes that one – and gets joy out of you having to give up friends, financial goals, physical activity, everything eventually – he's so patient – he can wait. All the while you sit home with him telling him what a good friend he is. Adapted from Joel Spitzer *Never Take Another Puff* pp 28.

"It's too late, I've already smoked too much for too long." Four years ago I helped a woman in her seventies to stop smoking with hypnosis. A few months later when I followed up with her she reported that her breathing had greatly improved, she had more stamina, she was more productive in her business, and her level of self esteem and confidence was much higher.

Every one who stops poisoning themselves with nicotine and the 4000 other poisonous chemicals in cigarettes and chewing tobacco experiences noticeable positive benefits – no matter how long they have been using or how much they have used.

* All of these statistics and their sources are found on www.tobaccofreekids.org

Gayle North offers Personal Coaching for Positive Change using recently developed empowerment technologies to clear mental and emotional blocks that keep people stuck in unhealthy habits and prevent them from performing at their highest potential in school, sports, relationships, work and finance. Call 406-837-1214 to learn how you can STOP SMOKING IN ONE HOUR and for coaching in person or by phone.

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