

By James N. Martin, Jr,  
President of A.C.O.G.

For people who smoke, kicking the habit is one of the healthiest things they can do for themselves. Cigarette smoking kills about 178,000 women each year in the US, shaving an average of 14.5 years off the lives of female smokers.

Each puff of cigarette smoke exposes users to 2,500 chemicals and cancer-causing agents, including nicotine, tar, and carbon monoxide. Smoking causes 87 percent of lung cancer deaths and increases the risk of developing cervical and other cancers. Smokers are more likely to experience heart attack, stroke, emphysema, bronchitis, osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis, cataracts, and infertility than non-smokers are.

Pregnant women who smoke put their babies at a higher risk for preterm birth, low birth weight, sudden infant death syndrome, poor lung function, asthma, and bronchitis. The harmful chemicals in cigarette smoke are also passed through breast milk to babies.

Smokers who quit can stop or reverse the damage caused by cigarettes. In the days and months after quitting, heart rate and blood pressure drop to healthier levels, and breathing, circulation, and sense of smell and taste may improve. Heart attack risk decreases by 50 percent within the first year after quitting, and the chances of developing lung cancer, heart disease, and other ailments fall to nearly that of a nonsmoker in the first few years.

Nicotine withdrawal and cravings derail 70 percent to 90 percent quit attempts. Anyone thinking about quitting, nicotine replacement products—such as patches, gum, lozenges, inhalers, and nasal spray—or doctor-prescribed medications, such as bupropion or varenicline, can help curb cravings and may increase chances of quitting successfully.

Smokers can call 800-QUIT-NOW, a free national smoking cessation hotline, to speak with trained counselors who will help develop individualized quit plans. Support groups, such as Nicotine Anonymous, and other local smoking cessation resources may also be a great place to start.

Set a quit date to throw away all cigarettes and clean clothes to get rid of the smoky smell. Keep busy on quit day—exercise, go to the movies, take a long walk, etc.—get plenty of water, and ask friends and family for support.

According to the American Cancer Society, more than 75 percent of women say they want to stop smoking. It takes most smokers several tries to finally quit for good. If the first attempt is not successful, don't get discouraged. Get some help and get back on track. For more information on smoking cessation, go to [www.cancer.org/](http://www.cancer.org/).