



# **Smoking and Veterans: What Peer Specialists Can Do to Help Veterans Quit**

Melanie Bennett, Ph.D.  
Research Health Scientist, VAMHCS  
Associate Director for Education, VISN 5 MIRECC  
Professor, Department of Psychiatry, UMSOM

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# Veterans and Smoking

Tobacco and Health page of the VA Public Health Office Website  
(<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/smoking/index.asp>)

*Smoking cessation persists as one of the VA's biggest public health challenges.*

*7 out of 10 Veterans who smoke want to quit and 1 out of 2 Veterans is successful.*

*Many Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, mood disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and other mental health conditions smoke and more than half want to quit.*

*A Veteran is more likely to succeed in quitting if they have support from those around them. Help add years to their life by supporting their efforts.*



### **Question 1**

**Why is quitting smoking important?**

### **Question 2**

**Why is quitting smoking hard?**

### **Question 3**

**What can Peer Specialists do to help Veterans plan to quit smoking?**

### **Question 4**

**What can Peer Specialists do to help Veterans quit smoking?**



# Question 1

**Why is quitting smoking important?**

**Tobacco smoke contains harmful chemicals. These chemicals are responsible for many health problems in Veterans and those who breathe in secondhand smoke.**

**Increased risk of developing or having complications from: hypertension, cancer, diabetes, cardiac disease, lung and breathing problems, healing after surgery**

# SMOKING

The chemicals found in cigarettes are also found in these other products.



butane  
lighter fluid

methane  
sewer gas

ethanol  
alcohol

nicotine  
insecticide

hydrogen cyanide  
gas chamber poison

arsenic  
poison

stearic acid  
candle wax

ammonia  
toilet cleaner

formaldehyde  
to preserve dead bodies

acetone  
paint stripper

acetic acid  
vinegar

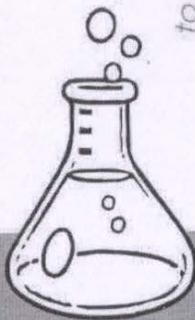
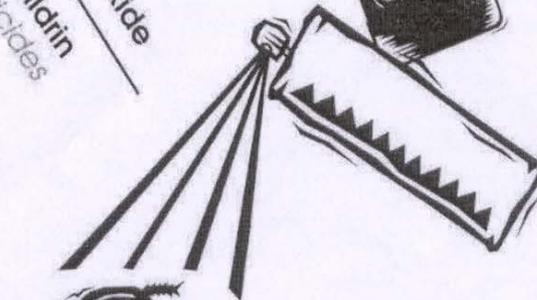
carbon monoxide  
insecticides

methanol  
rocket fuel

toluene  
industrial solvent

hexamine  
barbecue lighter

cadmium  
batteries





## Question 2

**Why is quitting smoking so hard?**

**Change is hard for everyone, even when we know we should change and even when we really want to change.**

**Smoking is a habit that's hard to break.**



# Change is Hard

- Habits are hard to break
- Ambivalence – it’s hard to gear up to change long-standing habits
- Think about anything you’ve ever tried to change
  - Some change is easy, most change is hard
  - We’ve tried in the past and “failed”
  - Low confidence
  - No one to help





## Stages of Change

- *Pre-contemplation* - Not ready
- *Contemplation* - Thinking about it
- *Preparation* - Getting ready
- *Action* - Making the change
- *Maintenance* - Sustaining change
- *Recycling* - Slipping back to old behaviors, need to start again



# The Truth: People Improve their Health Every Day

- People regularly quit smoking
- People regularly lose weight and improve their dietary habits
- People regularly increase their level of physical activity





## Question 3

**What can Peer Specialists do to help Veterans prepare to quit smoking?**

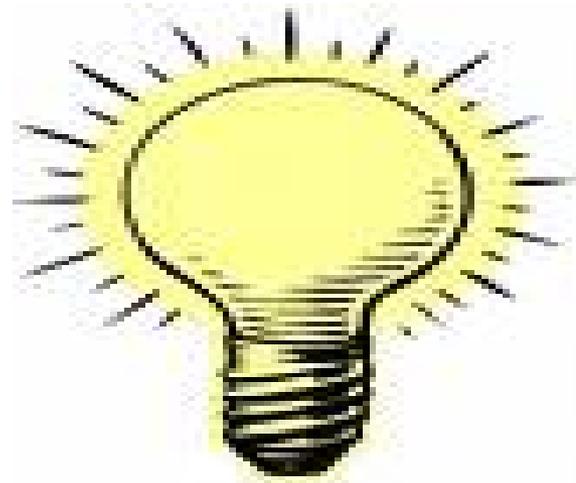
**A lot at every stage of change!**

- 1. Getting ready to quit**
- 2. Trying to quit**
- 3. Maintaining being quit**



## **Step 1: Getting Ready**

**Getting ready to quit is critical to success and can start before actual quitting.**





## **Ask the Veteran about Smoking**

- **Are you interested in talking today about quitting smoking? It is something I can help you with.**
- **How do you feel about trying to quit or changing your smoking?**
- **Has anyone talked to you about quitting smoking? The VA has lots of treatment resources.**



# Ask the Veteran his/her Reasons for Quitting

- **Why do you smoke?**
- **What's good about smoking? What purpose does it serve?**
- **Why change? What are important reasons for you?**
- **What obstacles will you face?**
- **Tools: Pros/Cons list**



# Pros and Cons List

## “Pros” of Smoking

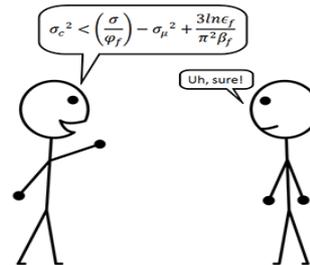
- Feels good
- Helps me feel calm when I’m upset
- Helps me cope
- Something to do
- Something I do to pass the time
- Something I do with my friends and family
- I enjoy smoking

## “Cons” of Smoking

- Makes it difficult to breathe
- My doctors and nurses have told me that my health problems are related to smoking
- Costs a lot of money
- Being a bad role model for my grandkids



# Help the Veteran Find Support



- **What kind of support does this Veteran need?**
  - **Practical? Emotional?**
- **Help the Veterans tell others that he/she is going to quit**
- **Practice ways to ask for help from others**
  - **Friends, Family, Professionals**



## Give the Veteran the Facts about Quitting

- **At every age, quitting increases your life expectancy.**
- **24 hours after quitting, chances of having a heart attack decrease.**
- **Within a month or two you can feel your lungs working better, you have more energy and no more cough.**
- **Quitting will greatly lower your chances of having a stroke and getting cancer.**
- **The people you live with will be healthier.**
- **You will have money and time to spend on other things!**



# What Happens When You Quit Smoking?



**smokefree60+**

By quitting smoking, you can reduce your risk of diabetes, lower your cholesterol, improve your muscle strength, and add years to your life.

10 years after quitting, your risk of all smoking-related cancers decreases by up to 50 percent.

<https://smokefree.gov/quitting-smoking/reasons-quit/benefits-quitting>



# Make Suggestions

- **Pay attention to when you smoke**
  - Write it down
  - Use an app
- **Look for patterns**
- **Try something new**
- **Identify a good time to quit**

