Break the habit: Many people will fail to quit smoking, especially on their first few tries, but this is no reason to give up.

IT IS World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) today and the theme this year is “Raising taxes on tobacco”.

Universiti Malaya Nicotine Addiction Research and Collaboration Centre coordinator and psychiatrist Dr Amer Siddiq Amer Nordin said increasing the price of cigarettes had proven to be effective in reducing consumption in many countries.

“The New Zealand government has a policy of consistently increasing taxes on tobacco at yearly intervals and I think achieving their goal of a completely smoke-free nation by 2025 is entirely possible,” said Dr Amer, agreeing this was a step in the right direction.

“An estimated six million people die from smoking-related diseases every year, and 10,000 of this number are Malaysians,” added the psychiatrist, who is pursuing a PhD on smoking cessation in New Zealand.
The World Health Organisation (WHO) created WNTD in 1987 and it is observed on May 31 every year. Smokers are encouraged to abstain from cigarettes for the entire day.

“During this time, countries that have signed the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) will be actively promoting awareness campaigns against tobacco consumption,” said Dr Amer.

Malaysia is one of the countries that have signed the FCTC, which it ratified on 2005. Malaysia is one of the countries that have signed the FCTC, which it ratified on 2005. Malaysia is one of the countries that have signed the FCTC, which it ratified on 2005. Currently, about one in five adults in Malaysia is a smoker, and most of them are men. This year was to promote the use of the #SmokeFreeMY hashtag on social media.

To help provide you with some ideas, Metro Online Broadcast (www.mob.com.my) interviewed Dr Amer on tips to quit smoking.

1. Give a reason

The first step to giving up cigarettes is to ask yourself: “Why do I want to quit smoking?” Whether it is for the sake of your health, family or to save money, having a reason helps strengthen your resolve.
2. How dependent are you?

Healthcare professionals will assess one's dependence on cigarettes by finding out how early in the day a smoker has to have his fix. Smoking in bed in the morning is a clear sign of heavy dependence.

3. Going “cold turkey”

It is possible for smokers to break the habit by stopping smoking without any assistance; a method referred to as “going cold turkey”. However, this rarely works and the average smoker will usually need additional help to quit.
4. Set a quit date

The next step to quitting smoking is to set a date. An ideal time frame would be a two-week period, during which the smoker gradually cuts down on the number of cigarettes he smokes in a day.

5. Get professional help

Individuals can seek help and advice from healthcare professionals, ranging from general practitioners to dentists and even pharmacists. In Malaysia, there are around 300 government-run “quit smoking clinics” that many people are not aware of.
6. Seek support

Support from family and friends is crucial to helping an individual quit smoking. Tell your non-smoking peers you want to quit smoking and they will surely support you every step of the way.

7. Medication may help

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) are over-the-counter medication that comes in many forms such as nicotine patches, nicotine gum and lozenges. However, non-NRT medications, which come in the form of pills, must be prescribed.
8. Some alternatives

Electronic cigarettes have become popular as a replacement for cigarettes, but according to Dr Amer, most healthcare professionals would not recommend them as their safe use has been questioned.
9. Positive reinforcement

Dr Amer says that positive reinforcement is very important to help a smoker persist in their attempt to quit smoking. Each time, he successfully resists the craving to smoke, he should be praised or rewarded for making good progress.

10. Do not give up

Many people will fail to quit smoking, especially on their first few tries, but this is no reason to give up. According to Dr Amer, the rate of success increases with each attempt at quitting smoking.
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