



Thoracic Clinic

ANNA JAQUES CANCER CENTER

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Great American Smokeout

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This Thursday, November 19th, marks the 40th annual, a nation-wide tradition that grew from a 1970 event just outside Boston, in Randolph, MA. The event inspires smokers to quit smoking, plan a day to quit, or celebrate another year of being smoke-free. And while there's a lot to celebrate — the most recent data puts the total number of smokers at just over 15 percent, down from half of all Americans in the 1960s — smoking is still all too common, resulting in lung cancer, shortened life expectancy, pulmonary diseases, and many other preventable health concerns.

Of course, quitting smoking isn't easy. Many of our patients have tried to quit, quit and relapsed, or haven't taken that first crucial step. But the millions of former smokers are a testament to the possibility of a smoke-free tomorrow, even for the heaviest smokers.

So what are the steps to successfully quit smoking?

Get screened: If you're concerned about your lung health or risk of developing lung cancer, we can evaluate you, get you screened, and offer early intervention. The earlier we identify problems, the more effectively we can treat them. Screening saves lives.

Create a plan: The next step is having your own personal smoking cessation plan. Many of our patients find it helpful to tell friends and family of their intent to quit. This works because not only are you making a commitment to yourself, but you're sharing this commitment with others. It creates a stronger barrier to going back on your word. Data shows that close to 40 percent of smokers who quit say that support from others was vital to their success.

Develop a healthy habit — exercise: If you're a regular smoker and not taking care of your body, you're probably also not exercising or taking care of your health. Committing to an exercise routine is a great way of setting measurable goals and substituting the false reward of smoking with the very real reward of a healthy lifestyle. Plus, it's always fun to hear patients' stories of how much more they can accomplish when their lungs are happier.

Stay clear of triggers: It's also important know what causes you to smoke: whether it's a night on the town, smoking after a meal, or spending time with certain friends. Try to avoid situations where you're likely to end up with a cigarette in your hands.



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Consider nicotine substitutes: We usually recommend that patients use a nicotine replacement to help quit smoking. It's very difficult to quit cold turkey — the withdrawal effects of nicotine, both physical and psychological, are very real and discomforting. Common nicotine replacements include nicotine gum or a patch.

Some patients have asked whether E-Cigarettes are a safe nicotine option. Based on the limited information available, it seems they are probably a better alternative than regular cigarettes, but more studies need to be done on E-cigarettes before we can definitively speak about their health risks or benefits. However, as E-cigarettes become more socially accepted, the concern is that the taboo of smoking regular cigarettes might go down too. E-cigarettes may also function as a gateway to traditional smoking. Potentially, E-cigarette smokers are future patients we haven't yet seen.

Use a 'quit smoking' app: Other new technology in the fight against smoking includes apps and online resources. The Massachusetts Health Alliance has really good apps that track the duration of your quit-time and show your health improvements over time. You can find other helpful resources by calling the [Massachusetts Smokers' Helpline](#) or visiting smokefree.gov.

Whatever resources you choose to use, we're here to help with a full array of lung care at BIDMC and at our new Thoracic Clinic at the Anna Jaques Cancer Center in Newburyport. So this November 19th, make a plan to quit or encourage a loved one to give up cigarettes. And remember, the Great American Smokeout is the one day of the year when quitters win.