

The Great American Smokeout Celebrates 26 Years on Thursday, November 21st

In 1971, Arthur P. Mullaney, of Randolph, Massachusetts, came up with a great idea. He asked his neighbors to give up cigarettes for a day and donate the money they would have spent for cigarettes to a high school scholarship fund. During the next five years the idea spread to other communities across the nation. On November 18, 1976, the California Division of the American Cancer Society persuaded nearly one million of the state's five million smokers to quit for 24 hours. A year later the American Cancer Society held the first General American Smokeout. The event became an annual tradition held on the third Thursday of November.

This year on November 15, the Great American Smokeout will celebrate its 25th anniversary. The event has had a profound effect on America's health: millions stop smoking for a day, and many of these people successfully take that further and quit for good. It also has changed attitudes toward smoking and resulted in public policies that help keep young people from starting to smoke and protect nonsmokers from the hazards of second-hand smoke.

"When the event began, smoking was accepted as the cultural norm," said Dr. Dileep G. Bal, national president of the American Cancer Society, which has continued to sponsor the event. "Now smoking is seen for what it actually is - a killer of nearly a million Americans each year."

Smokers are encouraged to put down their cigarettes, cigars or chewing tobacco for 24 hours. Society volunteers provide smoking cessation activities at local ACS offices. Hospitals and workplaces also distribute self-help materials and information. Many communities hold rallies and parades.

To convey the message that smoking is socially unacceptable, the Great American Smokeout has been chaired by some of America's most popular celebrities including Sammy Davis, Jr., Edward Asner, Natalie Cole, Larry Hagman and former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.

The event has been effective. For example, in 1999, 10 million Americans took the challenge. Of those participants, six percent reported they were smoking less than at all one to five days later. That's more than 600,000 adults who have taken the first step to leading a smoke-free, healthier life. Indeed, more people quit smoking on the day of the Great American Smokeout than any other day, including New Year's Day.

"Quitting is a process and few smokers accomplish it the first time," said John R. Seffrin, Ph.D., CEO of the ACS. "Because nicotine is so addictive, most people make four or more attempts before they quit for good. The Great American Smokeout gives them

an opportunity to make more than one attempt. They get encouragement from each other, so that they will be able to persevere. People also exchange tips on what helped them, so they can overcome barriers throughout the year."

The focus of the event has evolved from simply helping adults to abstain from helping children and teenagers understand that they should never begin smoking in the first place.

"The earlier a person begins using tobacco, the greater the risk to his or her health," said Dr. Bal. "Of every 10 smokers, eight begin before age 18. That's why the Great American Smokeout encourages young people to think seriously about the danger in which they place themselves when they begin using tobacco products."

Young people are encouraged to sign a Great American Smokeout Pledge certificate, promising that they will lead a smoke-free life and will not use tobacco products during the Great American Smokeout.

"One of the most important accomplishments of the Great American Smokeout is that it has helped nonsmokers by giving community leaders an opportunity to exchange ideas about how to protect people from the dangers of second-hand smoke," said Dr. Seffrin.

"In 1977, Berkeley, California, became the first community to limit smoking in restaurants and other places and now other communities do so too. The Great American Smokeout has also helped highlight other ideas like workplace smoking restrictions and the federal smoking ban on all interstate buses and domestic flights of six hours or less."

However, the Great American Smokeout still faces many challenges. Dr. Bal said. An estimated 47 million adults in the U.S. currently smoke and about half will die prematurely from smoking. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death for men and women. This year alone there will be about 169,500 new cases diagnosed in the U.S. more than 80 percent of lung cancers are thought to result from smoking.

"About 3,000 young people begin smoking every day, so we must continue to inform people of the dangers of smoking," Dr. Seffrin said. "More than 80 percent of smokers say they want to quit so ACS will continue to sponsor Great American Smokeout events, and on the other 364 days of the year, we will support smokers in other ways too, with self-help materials and information."

For more information about how to get involved in the Great American Smokeout, call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit the website at www.cancer.org

Maternal smoking linked to infant colic

By Suzanne Rosier

Women who smoke at least 15 cigarettes a day during pregnancy or shortly after birth may be twice as likely to have a fussy and seemingly inconsolable baby than women who do not smoke, the results of a study suggest.

The findings, published in August issue of Pediatrics, support previous studies demonstrating a link between smoking after birth and infant colic. While studies have not looked closely at the relationship between smoking during pregnancy and colic, smoking is known to affect the fetal growth and later health of a child, the researchers note.

Neither a mother's age, marital

status, alcohol and caffeine intake, breast feeding habits, the child's birth weight, nor a father's smoking habits affected the risk of infantile colic. Colic is defined as prolonged bouts of crying or irritability that occur more than three days a week for more than three weeks and have no known cause.

"Our study indicates that maternal smoking during pregnancy or in the postpartum period increases the risk of infantile colic," according to Dr. Charlotte Sondergaard from the University of Aarhus in Denmark and colleagues. "Ante- and postnatal care that includes advice of smoking cessation is important and also might be important for preventing infantile colic."

In an interview with Reuters Health, Sondergaard suggested that maternal smoking may affect the baby's gastrointestinal tract or irritate the upper respiratory airway in a way that raises the risk of colic.

She stressed, however, that the study did not examine how smoking, either during pregnancy or postnatally, affects the baby.

The study results are based on interviews with more than 1,800 women conducted during the 16th and 30th weeks of pregnancy and again eight months after delivery.

Women were asked about smoking and other lifestyle factors. About 30% of women were smokers of which 6% were heavy smokers. Overall, about 11% of infants had colic.

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