

## The resolution roundabout

By this time of the year many of us who made New Year's resolutions will have already relapsed. This is because these resolutions generally involve behaviour change – such things as doing more exercise, eating better and the cessation of smoking – and they're the most difficult of all changes to make.

Being able to stop smoking is especially difficult. The habit becomes addictive; with the nicotine in cigarettes as addictive as any drug. Even so, the proportion of Australians who smoke has now declined to an all time low of around 15%. Clearly some people are successful quitters; but sadly some young people still start smoking.

As to the reasons why people begin to smoke no doubt peer pressure is a potent factor; and surely the popularity of film and TV shows depicting life in the 1940s, 50s and 60s has at least in some way only served to glamorise the habit.

Interestingly, a couple of years ago an article in *New Scientist* magazine suggested smokers who watched movie stars light up cigarettes on screen, mentally light up themselves; and research conducted at the Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, confirms earlier work showing that smokers had increased cravings to smoke after they'd watched movies in which actors had smoked.

But, when it comes to smoking, any time is a good time to quit – there's nothing special about New Year; and regardless how long you've been a smoker, it's never too late to quit. Studies have shown that for smokers who quit at age 50, the risk of a tobacco related death is reduced by about two thirds; and for those who stop before middle age the risk is little more than for non-smokers.

However, becoming and staying a non-smoker doesn't happen by accident. Smokers who plan before they quit are significantly more successful than those who don't; and planning can be done quickly and easily. The decision to quit must be yours and yours alone, but to help you plan for long term success you should enlist the support of family and friends. Your pharmacist can also offer you valuable support.

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) is an option worth considering. These nicotine substitutes help to treat the withdrawal symptoms and cravings which can make it so difficult to quit. A variety of NRT products is currently available in Australia: patches, gum, inhaler, lozenges, mini-tablets and so-called sublingual spray. All these medications are now available from pharmacies without prescription; and two prescription-only products taken orally (*bupropion* and *varenicline*) may also be useful for some smokers who want to become committed quitters.

The effectiveness of NRT in aiding cessation is well established and is supported by the highest level of clinical evidence. Nevertheless, some people have concerns – unfounded concerns – about the continued use of nicotine to help smokers quit; but the reality is: using NRT to quit is always safer than smoking.

Recently, there have also been mixed messages about another major public health initiative; namely the use of sunscreens as part of the strategy to prevent skin damage and possible skin cancers. Apprehension about chemicals in sunscreens is misplaced. Products approved for use in Australia have had ingredients properly evaluated for safety and efficacy. And labelling regulations now permit the display of a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 50+ to more easily choose the products most suitable for all children and those of us who have inherited the European or Anglo-Celtic skin type.

For more self help strategies to help you quit smoking or prevent your skin from looking like mottled leather, check out the advice at pharmacies providing the *Self Care* health information. Call 1300 369 772 for the nearest location or visit the Pharmaceutical Society website at [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) and click on "Self Care" then "Use the Self Care Pharmacy Finder".