What is Tobacco Talk?

Tobacco Talk is a program of Hall Health’s Health Promotion Office to help students and employees of the University of Washington, as well as Hall Health patients, explore and make decisions around their tobacco use.

What is available?

Coaching and support through the process is the main offering of the program. Often the most overlooked part of a successful quit attempt is putting a plan together beforehand. We can help you answer some of the most important questions associated with making a change in your tobacco use.

We also are able to offer 8 weeks of some common forms of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT), such as the Nicotine Patch, Nicotine Gum, and Nicotine Lozenges. We’re also able to, in most cases, provide financial support towards the two FDA approved prescription medications.

What does a plan look like?

That depends on you. We are fully committed to making sure that any plan fits your needs and goals.

There are, however, some elements that many find to be helpful in preparing to stop using tobacco.

1) Set a Quit Date: This helps bring your plan into focus, and doesn't make it a constant case of, “Well, this is going to be my last pack/can.” Also, pick a day where you’re likely to experience as few challenges as possible.

2) Find support: Tell your spouse or significant other, your friends, your coworkers or classmates. Let them know how they can help (and what, however well-meaning, isn’t going to be).

3) Take it slow: Unless you’ve already been making changes to your tobacco use, don’t try to stop tomorrow. Give yourself some time to practice not using tobacco in places/times where you’re accustomed to.

4) Clear your living/work spaces: Don’t hang onto any lighters, ashtrays (or other containers) that might act as a cue to use tobacco. It might seem like it goes without saying, but make sure you’ve gotten rid of any remaining tobacco on your Quit Date. There’s no need to make things harder than necessary.

5) Use medications: You are much more likely to be successful if you use one of the prescription medications or a form of NRT. We can help you decide what might fit best into your plan.

6) Make it part of a larger process: Sometimes focusing solely on “quitting” using tobacco can actually make things more difficulty. Making it part of living a healthier lifestyle can make tobacco something that you don’t “quit,” but something that’s just not compatible with your new life. This could mean changing what you eat, getting more sleep, being more active, or other changes.

7) Don’t give up: Sometimes “Plan A” doesn’t work as well as we’d like. It might be hard to see it this way, but sometimes slips can be really helpful in helping us understand challenges that we hadn’t expected. If not using tobacco is your goal, then do try to not use any tobacco, but one slip doesn’t have to result in a full return to old patterns.

8) Use substitutions: Need something to keep your hands or mouth occupied? There are lots of options. Healthy snacks, chewing gum, calling or texting a friend, drinking a glass of water can all help take the place of tobacco.
Do I need to want to quit right now?

No! Definitely not!

Even if you’re just thinking about making a change, feel free to get in touch. There’s a lot that can be done even if you’re not thinking that you want to stop using tobacco right now.

Just actively thinking about what has become, for many, an ingrained habit has value. People often discover that the reasons that they started just don’t “fit” with the life they currently have.

Most people who use tobacco report at least some ambivalence about it. Understanding this ambivalence can help lead to a better understanding of the perceived benefits and drawbacks to tobacco use.

What are the benefits of quitting?

There are many benefits of not using tobacco, some of which are immediate, and some are more long-term. Here are some common reasons people make the decision to stop using tobacco:

- Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States, contributing to 480,000 lives lost every year.
- Smoking is expensive. If a pack costs $7, then a pack a day habit would cost around $2,500 a year or over $200 a month.
- People who quit using tobacco often report having more energy, having an easier time being active, improved concentration, and lower levels of stress.
- To no longer be dependent on a substance so that activities and days have to be structured around it. Also, no longer feeling the need to hide from friends and family.

What about the patches and gum? Don’t I want to stop using nicotine?

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has found that many forms of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) are both safe and effective in helping people stop using tobacco products. These include over the counter forms like Nicotine Patches, Gum, and Lozenges, and prescription forms like Nicotine Inhalers and Nasal Sprays.

While nicotine delivered through tobacco use commonly causes physical dependence, it is uncommon for those who use FDA approved forms of NRT to become dependent on them. It is also far safer to take in nicotine through an FDA approved form of NRT than it is to continue using tobacco. These products do not contain the chemicals present in most commercial tobacco products and the way they deliver nicotine is also far less harmful.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy products work by replacing the amount of nicotine you have become accustomed to which will minimize withdrawal symptoms as you stop using tobacco. It also helps maintain a steady level of nicotine in your system so that you do not experience the consistent “ups and downs” of withdrawal and relief experienced throughout the day by those who use tobacco regularly. As the withdrawal symptoms are minimized, most find it easier to focus on the other factors that have been associated with tobacco use.

NRT products are also meant to be used for a fixed amount of time, commonly starting at a level appropriate for one’s current nicotine intake and then stepping down over a period of approximately 8 weeks. Using the NRT for this period of time allows for new patterns and routines to be established, and for old habits to be broken. When used as directed, NRT can double your chances of successfully quitting.

How difficult is it going to be?

It can be challenging, but many find that it’s much easier than they expected, especially if they start with a plan.

One common misconception about stopping tobacco use is that it’s all about the nicotine in the tobacco products. While physical dependence on nicotine is an important element to address, it’s only one part of a larger picture.

It’s also important to look into when and why tobacco is used.

- Do you use tobacco at regular intervals of time, or is it more associated with particular activities?
- Do you use more tobacco at certain times of the day or week?
- Is there a difference between how much tobacco you use when you’re by yourself or when you’re with other people?
- Are you regularly around others who also use tobacco?
- Do you commonly feel a certain way when you feel the desire to use tobacco?

These are just some of the factors beyond nicotine that are necessary to address.

How do I get started?

Your provider at Hall Health can make a referral or you can contact the program coordinator, Colin Maloney, directly. We’re located on the first floor of Hall Health, in the Health Promotion Office, just to your right as you enter the building.

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