

The Daily Union opinion page



W.D. HOARD
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Try kicking the habit

An estimated 46 million adults in the United States smoke, and one in five of them die each year. Each day here in Wisconsin, 120 adolescents light up for the first time, with half of them becoming addicted.

There are a lot of reasons why people acquire and continue this hazardous habit. University of Wisconsin-based research found that moderate and heavy smokers of six to 20 and 21 or more **cigarettes** a day, respectively, tend to have family and friends who smoke and work in places that allow smoking. Addiction and habit are the main reasons for continuing to smoke, as well as the feeling that smoking is relaxing and helps them cope.

Lighter smokers who have five **cigarettes** or less a day or who are occasional tobacco users view smoking as a social activity. They are more likely to cite using alcohol as a contributing factor, although three-fifths of them also cite addiction.

Most smokers want to quit — 60 percent of the teens in the study said they want to kick the habit — and most smokers have tried. However, worries about cravings and nicotine withdrawal, plus a fear of failure, prevent

them from trying again. Then there are the lack of willpower, weight gain, peer pressure, experimentation, looking “cool” ... ask any smoker and you'll hear more excuses.

Yet, if they're really serious about it, then trying again to quit is a must. And we know just the day to do it.

Thursday, Nov. 20, marks the Great American Smokeout, the American Cancer Society's campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of tobacco use and secondhand smoke. The idea is that stopping is easier with others' support. And it works.

Since the first Smokeout three decades ago, the American Cancer Society has been able to change society's view of smoking from an accepted, cultural norm to a real hazard that kills nearly a half-million Americans each year. Along with that, countless lives have been saved.

And now yours can be among them. This Thursday, join the more than 15 million people across the country expected to be participating in the Great American Smokeout. If you can quit for just one day, then perhaps you'll be able to quit forever. At the very least, it's worth a try.