

Tips From Former Smokers – 2013 Campaign

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Host] Since 2002, there have been more former smokers than current smokers in the United States. But many Americans still smoke. About 45 million adults and three million middle and high school students smoke cigarettes. One in three young adults currently smoke. Most smokers start young, become addicted, and then have trouble quitting.

The CDC Office on Smoking and Health is the lead federal agency for comprehensive tobacco prevention and control, and is working hard to help smokers succeed.

Dr. Tim McAfee, director of the Office of Smoking and Health, is here today to talk with us about quitting smoking and how CDC's national tobacco education campaign can help.

Welcome, Dr. McAfee.

[Dr. McAfee] It's great to be here.

[Host] What's the most exciting thing your office is doing to help people quit?

[Dr. McAfee] In 2012, we launched the first national tobacco education campaign called, "Tips from Former Smokers." It features former smokers showing the real consequences that cigarette smoking has had on their lives.

[Host] How does the campaign help people quit smoking?

[Dr. McAfee] As a doctor, I've seen the damage that smoking causes daily. Seeing how smoking impacted and completely changed my patients' health and dramatically changed their lives made the dangers of smoking very clear to me in a way that no fact or statistic could.

The idea behind the Tips campaign was to show the public what doctors see every day. The campaign motivates people to quit by having real people tell their stories of how smoking caused them to lose – at a relatively young age – the ability to speak, to breathe normally, or just to live normal lives.

The ads also refer smokers to resources to help them quit. All are tagged with 1-800-Quit-Now or the TIPS campaign website. When you call the quit line number, you can talk with a trained coach who helps you come up with your own plan to quit. I now want to share one of the new radio ads that we just released.

I'm Terrie. Smoking gave me cancer. If you're a smoker, I have a tip for you. Make a recording of yourself now, before you have your voice box removed. Read a children's story book or sing a lullaby. I wish I had done that. The only voice my grandson's ever heard is this one.

[Terrie Singing] The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round. The wheels on the bus go round and round, all through the town.

[Announcer] Smoking causes immediate damage to your body. You can quit. For free help, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW. A message from the US Department of Health and Human Services and CDC.

If you haven't seen the ads, I encourage you to go to the TIPS website at cdc.gov/tips to meet the participants, hear their powerful stories, and get valuable information and support about quitting. I was inspired by their courage to tell these difficult stories and impressed with how urgently they wanted to tell other people to keep it from happening to them. As you might imagine, the ads really motivated people to try to quit. Overall, hundreds of thousands of people called the quit line or visited the website. Round 2 of the Tips campaign is running from April to July 2013.

[Host] You mentioned that you're also a family physician. What challenges have your patients faced when trying to quit?

[Dr. McAfee] First is the addictive nature of tobacco, particularly cigarettes. My patients are smart and motivated and lead normal, productive lives. But they had a really hard time quitting. It wasn't because of a character flaw. They were dealing with the challenges of stopping an addictive behavior.

The second was staying motivated. They might start the day motivated but by the end of the day, their motivation would be almost gone because of the craving and urges associated with the addiction.

[Host] What are some of the reasons you would give your patients to help them stop smoking?

[Dr. McAfee] I would say it's important for them to discover their own reasons for quitting. For some, it might be the money, or that they want to gain control back over what they do. For many others, it may be related to long- or short-term health, or for the sake of their family.

I would tell them, "If you smoke, you have at least one chance in three of dying from it." Smoking is the biggest preventable killer in middle age, and for every person who dies, there are 20 more who develop a serious chronic disease. The bottom line is that you will gain six to ten years of life expectancy when you quit. There's nothing else that you can do that has an impact like that.

[Host] What are some suggestions to help people quit?

[Dr. McAfee] Well, my first suggestion would be to just do it. If you don't succeed the first time, try again. Many people have to try a number of times before they're successful – it's like learning to ride a bike. Most people will fall off a few times before they get the hang of it.

Some simple tips include cleaning out all the paraphernalia that you use for smoking, including your lighters, ashtrays, and of course, your cigarettes.

Be an excuse buster. Your mind will try to create all kinds of reasons to give in, like “If I just had this one, that can’t hurt,” or “I can try again tomorrow.” But don’t let that part of your mind succeed; come up with counter-arguments.

Don’t hesitate to get help if you feel like you need it. Talk to your health care provider, visit the TIPS website, or use other counseling services in your community. And you can always call 1-800-Quit-Now.

[Host] If listeners aren’t smokers, but know someone who is, what can they do?

[Dr. McAfee] Well first, encourage them to quit. Now many take the approach of whacking their family members over the head. But you’ll be much more effective if you encourage them. Encourage them to use support services if they think that might help. And most important, continue to be sympathetic.

[Host] If you had to send one message to those who are trying to quit, what would it be?

[Dr. McAfee] More than half of people who have ever smoked have already quit, and you can too.

[Host] Thank you, Dr. McAfee. For more information, visit the Tips campaign site at cdc.gov/tips.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.