

Quitting the deadly habit doesn't have to be an absolute killer

Are scary health statistics or the 25 per cent cigarette price increase not enough to turn you off smoking?

Well, spare a thought for your appearance.

That's the message model and TV presenter Chloe Maxwell is determined to spread. The former smoker recently took part in the World No Tobacco Day campaign, allowing her image to be digitally altered to show how she'd look at the age of 72 as a smoker and a non-smoker. The images show just how much smoking can cause premature ageing.

'We live in such an image-conscious society and the health warnings just don't seem to be enough,' Chloe says. 'And statistically it's the young females who are still smoking. Hopefully these images will help deter them if they know it's going to affect the way they look.'

Chloe, 34, who smoked for about 13 years, kicked the habit with patches and lozenges, and has been smoke-free for the past five years.

'What really motivated me was wanting to have kids,' the mother of two says. 'It overrode my desire to smoke when I realised how important it was to be healthy for my children.'

The good news is there are simple, effective and affordable methods available. Here's how some ordinary people butted out for good...

Butt out FOR GOOD!



TV presenter Chloe Maxwell (above) allowed her image to be digitally altered to show how she'd look if she smoked until age 72.

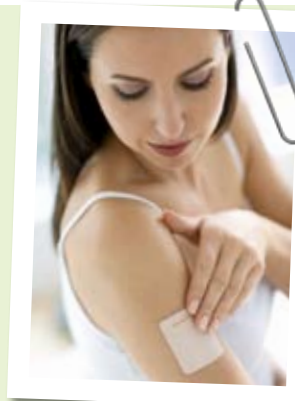
THE METHOD: NICOTINE PATCHES

Nicotine replacement works on the proviso that it delivers a nicotine hit similar to smoking without all the dangerous toxins of lighting up. You can then dose down on the patches, which come in different strengths, and eventually phase them out altogether.

Jenny's story: Sydney journalist Jenny Brown smoked for longer than she cares to remember and had tried to quit a few times. But a friend's 40th birthday party was the last straw.

'There were two people I knew there, really heavy smokers, and they'd both given up. I thought if they could do it, so could I,' she says. 'The following day I went out and bought some patches and never had another cigarette from that day on. That was a year ago.'

THE VERDICT: 'I found it really helpful,' says Jenny, who used the patches for three months. 'It at least gets rid of nicotine cravings, but you still have other problems - like being desperate to put something in your mouth! But at least you don't have cravings and you eventually wean yourself off nicotine.'



THE METHOD: CHAMPIX

This prescription-only medication blocks the receptors in the brain that crave the nicotine. If you're 18 years and over the Federal Government will subsidise one course of treatment (12 weeks) per year at a cost of about \$60.

John's story: Having smoked a packet a day for about 18 years, art director John Juliani, 38, went to see his GP about Champix.

'I stopped smoking about three weeks into the treatment. I went out with a bunch of smokers and had two cigarettes. It made me feel nauseous and that was the last time,' he says. 'I'm still on the medication and I've got another 10 days to go.'

THE VERDICT: 'The first week I felt a little bit depressed. But there were other things going on in my life, so I can't attribute 100 per cent of it to the drugs,' John says. 'It was only a week of my life and I think the rewards far outweigh that time.'



THE METHOD: ALLEN CARR'S EASYWAY

Non-smoking guru Allen Carr was an accountant who decided to give up his 100-a-day habit and share his success in a book. He later opened clinics around the world. Allen's method looks at the psychology of the habit, removing the desire to smoke. It's reportedly helped some 10 million people worldwide, including Sir Anthony Hopkins and Sir Richard Branson.

Luke's story: Having read some of Allen Carr's book, Luke Malone decided to try the Allen Carr clinic in Sydney (www.allencarr.com.au). At \$550, it's not cheap, but there's a money-back

guarantee if it doesn't work, and after an initial five-hour session, you can attend as many follow-up sessions as you need.

'You don't really hear about people being sick from smoking in their 20s but you do hear about people in their 30s,' says Luke, who smoked for about 15 years. 'I'm 30 in six months time and I thought I should stop now.'

THE VERDICT: 'The thing that stuck with me is that every time you smoke you feel you are relieving a craving, but all you are doing is creating a false, positive ammunition for the next craving,' Luke says. Smoke-free for six weeks now, he feels more and more positive about leaving behind the habit for good.

THE METHOD: HYPNOTHERAPY

The image of a man dangling a watch and taking control of your mind is a myth, says the UK Hypnotherapy Association. Hypnosis is a state of heightened relaxation and altered awareness, which can tap into your subconscious in order to effect change.

Carmela's story: South Australian childcare coordinator Carmela Pettet's GP was a qualified hypnotherapist and suggested the treatment when she raised concerns about her smoking.

'The doctor gets you to think about positive images and good experiences. For me that was when I was young,' Carmela says. 'I could see how I looked, how happy I was. It helped me feel I didn't need anything to make me happy.'

THE VERDICT: 'Every time I got tempted I used that beautiful image that evoked positive feelings,' she says. 'You have to be committed.'

Carmela stopped smoking three years ago despite the fact her husband still smokes.

THE METHOD: COLD TURKEY

Those two little words can strike fear into the heart of a smoker. It simply means putting down that cigarette and using only your mental strength to say no.

Belinda's story: Belinda White started smoking when she met her boyfriend. But when they broke up, the admin worker from New South Wales was left with the habit.

'Ten years later and after about seven attempts to quit, I woke up one morning and literally felt like I was being poisoned,' Belinda says. 'I had tingles in my arms, so I decided to go cold turkey.'

THE VERDICT: 'If you say it's too hard, you're not giving it a go,' Belinda, 32, says. 'But if you give it a go for about five days and realise how good you feel, you can try another day and another. That's the best way to take it - one day at a time.'



Q&A



New Idea medico Dr John D'Arcy answers all your medical questions

Q I recently read a report that 2.5 million baby boomers, or more than three-quarters of people over the age of 55, are at risk of heart disease and stroke. I fall into this age group and wondered if I need to get my heart checked at a certain age?

MAUREEN, VIA EMAIL

A Many women suffer heart attacks and strokes, but they suffer them later in life than men. The facts show women are three times more likely to die from a heart attack than breast cancer and are slow to get the right treatment at the right time.

Until menopause at about age 50, oestrogen produced by the ovaries nourishes the blood vessels and slows degenerative changes that cause blood vessel destruction - heart disease and stroke.

Often women in their 50s are worrying about their partner's risk of heart attack. But the same changes are happening to them.

Women over 50 move less and this decreased action, combined with the lack of oestrogen, means they increase their weight and put on unhealthy fat. This new fat begins to grow around the organs of the abdomen and is called 'visceral fat'.

So don't put off that check-up. Your doctor will take a personal and family history and will be interested in a history of blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack and stroke, because these conditions run in the family.

Examination of your blood pressure, eyes, heart and abdomen will be done. Your doctor will check the size of your waist and if the measurement is greater than 80cm, it will indicate that fat is increasing in the abdomen and increasing your risk.

You'll be asked to learn your numbers - blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and waist measurement - and work with your doctor to make sure they don't rise.

Buy a pedometer and do 10,000 steps most days of the week. By exercising, giving up smoking and watching your diet, you'll reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Chloe's three tips for quitters

1. Call a friend

When you feel like lighting up call a good friend for a chat and you'll soon forget about the craving.

2. Seek help

If you're really struggling, seek some professional counselling. I think addiction is deep rooted inside you like an insecurity or something you haven't got over.

3. Be strong

Smoking is a very psychological thing. You have to make the decision you're not going to pick up one and put it in your mouth.

By Vera Derial

ASK DR JOHN FOR ADVICE

Do you have a question for Dr John? Post it to Dr John D'Arcy, New Idea, GPO Box 7814, Sydney, NSW 2001, or email health@newidea.com.au.