
TOBACCO CESSATION: DO SMOKERS NEED PROFESSIONAL HELP TO QUIT?

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Tobacco use is considered a risk factor for 6 of the 8 leading causes of death worldwide and is known to cause diseases affecting the heart and lungs¹. Tobacco has a definite role in the etiology of a number of dental morbidities, and is an established risk factor for Oral Cancer and periodontitis.

World health organization reported more than a billion smokers worldwide. The number of smokers is increasing and a shift of increased number of smokers in developing world is noticed. Tobacco is a big killer as more than 10% of adult deaths annually, from all causes are attributed to it. Moreover, tobacco kills almost five and a half million annually and on the average 10 persons per minute².

Considering gravity of the situation, a global and local tobacco control strategy becomes very important. The Government of Pakistan has increased taxes on tobacco products, banned its use in public places to discourage its use. This strategy would help reduce the number of tobacco products used by individuals. But what's missing is to focus on regular smokers, and assess whether they need professional help to quit tobacco.

Most of the smokers find it difficult to quit on their own, while some successful quitters consider motivation, will power and commitment important factors. How can a regular smoker be motivated is still not clear and needs more research³. The self-quit proportion for regular smokers is 3-5%⁴, which is quite low and most of the tobacco users find it difficult to quit, even after feeling the effects after years of smoking. The reason could be addiction to daily dose of nicotine to the brain. A good number of smokers want to quit at some time, but it is also noted that only a limited number of these smokers have ever tried⁵.

The clinical practice guidelines for treatment of Tobacco use and dependence, recommends the use "Five A's" for tobacco cessation⁶. The first step of this smoking cessation protocol is to "ASK" an individual about current smoking status and any previous attempt to quit smoking. The next step is to "ADVISE", through a clear and strong personalized message and help identify a quitting date. This is followed by "ASSESS", whether the smoker is ready to quit. This is followed by the step "ASSIST", in which literature is provided to help the smoker understand the benefits of quitting. The last step is called "ARRANGE", which means arranging a follow up visit, usually after 1 to 2 weeks of quitting date. Health professionals are considered as a credible source of information. Family physicians can play a very important part in helping their patients who are regular smokers. By bringing "Five A's" model into practice, a physician can give a better opportunity to a smoker to understand the health hazards of tobacco use, and know the benefits of quitting periodically. This can lead to a higher percentage of successful tobacco quitters. Other healthcare professionals, who can play an important role in helping smokers quit, are the dental professionals. A patient would spend more time in a dental office and routine dental advice should also include quit tobacco, along with oral hygiene instructions and dietary advice. Dental associations should encourage their members to advise patients about oral and systemic hazards of tobacco products.

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