The American Cancer Society Great American Smokeout is Thursday, November 19

November 16, 2015–Every year since 1976, the third Thursday in November marks the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout, a day when smokers are encouraged to quit for the day and make a plan to quit for good. In 2015, that is Thursday, November 19.

Quitting even for one day can be an important step in creating a tobacco-free life, but even that is not easy. "A smoker's first cigarette might seem like a choice, but very soon, it becomes an addiction that shortens the lives of half of its victims," said Cliff Douglas, vice president for tobacco control. "Most smokers start before age 18, and many even before they become teenagers, so usually that 'choice' was made by kids long before they were of age to make a rational, thoughtful decision about whether to use a highly addictive product. And of course they were aggressively targeted by the tobacco industry."

Nearly seven out of ten smokers (68%) say they want to quit. In any year, about four in ten (42%) try. But very few, somewhere between 4% and 7%, succeed on their own on any given attempt. Studies show that with the aid of medications, as many as 25% of smokers can stay smoke-free for over 6 months, and that combining medication use with counseling increases success.

"Some people are able to quit on their own, without the help of others or the use of medicines," said Mr. Douglas. "For many though, it can be extremely hard to break not only the physical addiction, but also the social and emotional ties to smoking. The most important step is the first one: making the decision to quit. We hope the Great American Smokeout gives smokers an opportunity to consider making a lifesaving change."

The first Great American occurred on November 18, 1976, when the California Division of the American Cancer Society got nearly one million smokers to quit for the day. The Society took the program nationwide in 1977. The Smokeout has helped dramatically change Americans' attitudes about smoking, helping bring about community programs and smoke-free laws that are now saving lives in many states. Many public places and work areas are now smoke-free, protecting non-smokers and encouraging smokers to quit.

Today, smokers have more tools than ever to help quit smoking. But as many former smokers know well, it often takes several committed quit attempts, using any of several tools before a method works for them.

Below is a timeline highlighting some of the many immediate and longer-term benefits of quitting:

- 20 minutes: Your heart rate and blood pressure drop.
- 12 hours: The carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- 2 weeks to 3 months: circulation improves and lung function increases.
- 1 to 9 months: Coughing and shortness of breath decrease; cilia start to regain normal function in the lungs, increasing the ability to clean the lungs and reduce infection.
- 1 year: The excess risk of coronary heart disease is reduced by half
- 5 years: Risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, and bladder are cut in half. Stroke risk can fall to that of a non-smoker after 2-5 years.
- 10 years: The risk of dying from lung cancer is about half that of a person who is still smoking. The risk of cancer of the larynx (voice box) and pancreas decreases.
- 15 years: The risk of coronary heart disease is that of a non-smoker's.

Thanks to increased awareness, research, and other efforts, smoking rates have dropped dramatically in the past several decades, from about 42% of adults in 1965 to 16.8% in 2014, the latest year for which numbers are available. That progress represents a saving of 8 million lives in the U.S. since the first Surgeon General's report, based on the number of people who either quit smoking or who never started. Still, about 42 million adults currently smoke cigarettes, and tobacco remains the leading preventable killer in our society, responsible for nearly one in five deaths and at least 30% of all cancer deaths.

"The rapid drop in smoking rates over the past several decades was an enormous challenge, and represents a true public health victory," said Mr. Douglas. "But reducing smoking among those who continue to smoke may be even a bigger challenge." Studies show smoking is higher among those with less education and those living below the poverty level. Also, an estimated 40% of all cigarettes are smoked by adults with mental illness.

"In light of the changing demographic of tobacco users in the U.S., the American Cancer Society has set as its top priority reducing tobacco-related health disparities in high-burden communities with particular focus on those with lower socioeconomic status, individuals with mental health and substance abuse disorders, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities, and racial and ethnic minorities."

For more information, visit: www.cancer.org/smokeout

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