

Using the Internet to help young smokers quit

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Many young smokers want to quit but don't know what methods work.

The University of Illinois at Chicago is leading a \$2.9 million National Cancer Institute project to increase demand for evidence-based, Internet-based [smoking](#) cessation treatment among [young adults](#).

"Even though many young adults think about quitting and actually want to stop smoking, they tend not to use what we know works -- evidence-based approaches to quitting," said psychology professor Robin Mermelstein, director of UIC's Institute for Health Research and Policy and principal investigator of the five-year study.

Young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 have the highest rates of smoking compared to any other age group, but they have among the lowest rates of quitting, according to Mermelstein.

A multidisciplinary team of investigators from UIC, the University of Iowa and the American Legacy Foundation will work with GDS&M Idea City advertising agency to develop interactive, Internet-based ads and evaluate what messages motivate young smokers to use the evidence-based stop smoking program www.BecomeAnEx.org.

"Our prior research has shown that if you want to reach and engage young adults, then you need to go where they are, and the Internet is it," said Mermelstein. "Our approach is to develop messages that might have enduring value and deliver these messages across the Internet to drive the

demand of young adults to seek evidence-based treatments. Ultimately, we want to help young smokers to quit smoking now before they continue to accrue the health risks associated with smoking."

Research has shown that young adults have misconceptions about treatment and a lack of awareness about treatment availability and accessibility.

"They often express skepticism about treatments, or think they are better off using alternative approaches, and tend to dismiss what we know works," said Mermelstein. "We need to demystify those beliefs about treatment; that treatment is not bad, that it's often the surest way to quit."

The nationwide study will enroll more than 3,000 young smokers via the Internet, recruiting through sites like Craigslist.

The four-part study will develop Internet-based ads, evaluate if the ads are reaching young adults and driving them to Internet-based cessation programs, determine if the approaches are effective, and find out if those who used the Internet-based program were successful in stopping smoking.

Source: University of Illinois at Chicago ([news](#) : [web](#))

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