

How to help a friend quit smoking

February 12 2014, by Mifa Kim

My name is Mifa Kim. I'm a senior studying psychology and a peer educator at CU-Boulder's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). I am spreading the word about the How to Help a Friend campaign, an online resource with information and advice on how CU community members can help friends or other people in their lives who may be encountering various challenges. This month I am focusing on helping a friend who wants to quit smoking.

Even though it may be a common resolution, [quitting smoking](#) can be a very personal and difficult resolution to carry out. In my experience with family and friends who have gone through the journey of quitting, having a support system can make the process much more possible. If your friend is on the fence about quitting, you can help by thinking of reasons to quit, setting a target quit date and letting them know that you would be there for them if they decide to quit. The following are some suggestions on how you can help your friend quit. And don't forget, we are now a smoke-free campus.

Common Myth About Quitting Smoking: If I can't quit the first time, then I won't ever be able to quit smoking.

Reality: Quitting is hard for everyone. Most people do not quit on their first time—in fact, most people quit five to seven times before quitting for good. "Slips" (having a puff or smoking one or two cigarettes) are also pretty common. If your friend has slipped, you can remind them of all the good reasons they decided to quit. Praise all of their nonsmoking efforts and don't guilt them on their "slips." Remember, quitting is a

process that takes time and effort, but is very possible.

The following suggestions highlight different ways that you can help your friend quit smoking.

What kinds of things can I do to help a smoker try to quit?

- Suggest that your friend reduce their smoking if they are not ready to fully quit – even one fewer cigarette per day can improve their health and will make it easier if they decide to quit at a later date.
- For the first few days after the smoker quits, be ready to help. They may want to talk all the time or want extra help when a tough situation comes up, like a coffee break, a party or after a meal.
- Offer to call or check in on how they are doing. Ask how they are feeling, not just whether or not they are still not smoking.
- No nagging, scolding or preaching. Instead, let them know how much you admire them for trying to quit.
- Help them find replacements for routines they associate with [smoking](#). For example, if someone smokes while they are driving, finding a new route can reduce cravings they feel.

Can I help my friend plan how to handle urges to smoke?

Yes. In fact, those who succeed in quitting plan ahead about how to cope with urges to smoke. Offer to help your friend think up some simple things that they will do when they get an urge to smoke. Here are a few ideas:

- Call you when they feel the urge to smoke. Remind them that the urge to smoke will pass in about 20 minutes for most people—whether they smoke a cigarette or not.
- Leave the place that makes them want to smoke. For example, a party where alcohol is served may make them want a cigarette. Go for a walk around the block, or better yet, stay away from parties and alcohol for the first few weeks.
- Do some deep breathing if they are feeling tense. Breathe in and breathe out slowly to bring more air into the lungs, which will help trigger the relaxation response.
- Refer them to Community Health in UMC 411, who can give them tips on how to quit and provide a starter pack of nicotine replacement gum which can help with the initial cravings.

How long do I need to help my friend?

- The first seven to 10 days are the toughest—so your friend may need extra help then. Most smokers who relapse do so within the first three months. So try to keep in close touch for that time.
- Ex-smokers may have an urge to smoke for months, even years, after they stop. This is normal. Remind your [friend](#) that these urges happen less and less often as time passes. You can also help celebrate quit-date anniversaries.

More information: [How to Help a Friend](#) — Want more information stress or more topics? Worried about someone? This is a peer-to-peer resource to help students help each other.

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) — A free counseling resource for CU Boulder students. CAPS offers six individual counseling sessions per academic year and unlimited workshops and groups. We have walk-in hours from M-F, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. and we are located at the Center for Community (C4C) at S440. 303-492-6766

[Community Health, Wardenburg Center \(located in UMC 411\)](#) — Offers free, starter packs of nicotine replacement gum, referrals to the quitline, as well as, confidential, one-on-one tobacco cessation counseling to students. 303-492-2937

[Colorado Quit Line](#) — The Colorado Quit Line is a free online service available to Colorado residents 15 years of age and over and offers eight weeks of free nicotine replacement therapy.

[Smoke Free Txt](#) — This is a mobile service designed for young adults across the United States. It provides 24/7 encouragement, advice, and tips to help smokers stop smoking for good.

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