

Try, try again: More apps joining anti-smoking arsenal

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You don't need a crystal ball to make this projection about the future: Ditching the cigarettes is - and will likely continue to be - the single most important thing you can do for your health.

And our digital devices will help make it easier, experts predict.

Smoking-cessation apps are evolving and adapting so quickly that they are becoming a bit like that voice you wish you had whispering in your ear, or a helpful hand on your steering wheel, guiding you clear of smoking "triggers" long before they have you reaching for a light.

We are only beginning to get a glimpse of the type of features-rich apps that can be a powerful tool to help someone stop smoking, said David H. Gustafson, a professor of industrial engineering and preventive medicine at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

A [smartphone app](#) that uses GPS and other personal data could sound the alarm when someone is moving close to a familiar haunt that suggests trouble - like a bar where the beers seem to go hand-in-hand with the smokes. It might even be able to signal friends and loved ones who stand ready to intervene, he said. Or it could trigger a recording of a daughter's voice saying, "Daddy, please don't do that. Come home."

It might reek of Big Brother to some, but it could be embraced by cigarette addicts who are willing to do anything to quit, he said.

"The point is to reach out to the person, see how they're doing, remind them of key kinds of things that will be beneficial to them if they stop smoking, and (smartphone capabilities) are changing all the time," Gustafson said.

There are plenty of smoking-cessation apps and websites on the market. And even though they might not come with a GPS-triggered phone call to your spouse, they will create a sense of support that will help some people turn away from cigarettes.

All you have to do is keep searching until you find an approach that resonates with you, experts say.

Would you be willing to try guided meditation when the urge strikes? There's an app that can help with that. Are you a tad competitive? There are apps that "dare" you to quit and stack up your progress against other users. Or how about an app that boosts your self-esteem, cheering you on each time you wrestle an urge into submission? If you're motivated by money, plenty of apps will allow you to see how much green you're saving. Others frighten you with an in-your-face look at the health risks.

Bottom line: Don't stop until you find the right app or online community, Gustafson said.

But if you're thinking "why bother" because nothing has worked before, then know this: The strongest predictor of future success just might be your stunning number of failures, said Stanton Glantz, professor of medicine at UC San Francisco and head of the school's Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education.

"It sounds counterintuitive," Glantz said, "but just the number of attempts is a strong indicator of (ultimate) success."

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