

It's always a good time to quit

By John Bell

It's on or about New Year's Day that well intentioned resolutions are made; and it's quite often not much later that those resolutions are broken. Studies show that nearly two thirds of smokers would like to quit, but fewer than one in 20 people who try to stop smoking will remain non smokers after three months.

Of course that's no reason to quit the quit attempts; the more often you try the more likely you are to be successful. If you're one of those people who tried unsuccessfully to stop smoking in January, why not give it another try? With the World Health Organization (WHO) sponsored *World No Tobacco Day* coming up on 31 May, there'll be plenty of encouragement and support. And it's always a good time to quit.

The epidemic of tobacco use is one of the greatest public health threats the world has faced.

Smoking is one of the leading causes of preventable death. In fact, tobacco is the only product which, when used as directed, causes ill health and death.

This year nearly six million people will die from a tobacco-related heart attack, stroke, cancer, a lung ailment or other disease. Of this number, around 5 million are current users or former users of tobacco, but there are also more than 6000,000 people - almost a third of them children - who will die from second-hand smoke; that is the smoke that some unthinking or inconsiderate smoker has puffed out.

Generally the introduction of measures to improve community health are universally supported - measures such as the building of effective sewage systems, the availability of clean drinking water and the promotion of vaccination. However, according to WHO, the efforts of various countries to implement tobacco control, and thus save thousands of lives, is being energetically undermined by the tobacco industry.

So, this year, the theme for *World No Tobacco Day* is "ban tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship".

Regardless of how cigarettes are presented, there would hardly be a man, woman or even child in Australia who doesn't know about the dangers of smoking. And yet, there are probably many reasons why people begin to smoke – peer pressure is a particularly relevant factor in young women. But the reality is, once you start smoking it's mighty hard to stop.

Until recently, it was thought that stopping smoking completely – either cold turkey or with the help of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) – was the best way to ensure becoming a long term non-smoker. But this “quick stop” method doesn't suit everyone.

The “cut down then stop” (CDTS) method has now been given the official seal of approval. Evidence has shown that reducing the number of cigarettes smoked with the assistance of NRT, makes it easier for some heavily addicted smokers to ultimately quit completely.

Also, the simultaneous use of more than one nicotine replacement therapy product used not to be considered appropriate. But experience has shown that some smokers who continue to have cravings with single therapy, or those who have quit in the past and then relapsed, will benefit and become long-term quitters by using the patches and gum together.

There are many myths and misconceptions about the effects of nicotine and NRT. If you need some help to quit, make sure you get the facts and the right advice on what products will suit you best. Ask for the fact cards on *Smoking* and *Staying a Non-smoker* from one of the pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society's (PSA) Self Care health information. Log on to the website at www.psa.org.au or phone 1300 369 772 for the nearest location.

Of course if you're already a non smoker, make sure you avoid all that smoke other people are generating.