

## Previewing...



## Pros do not outweigh cons for tobacco use

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4/8/2011 - **ALTUS AIR FORCE BASE, Okla.** -- The use of tobacco is a constant battle. I have struggled with on and off tobacco use since I was 15 years old. Quitting tobacco is not an easy battle to win, but with the right weapons it is possible.

Mark Twain said, "To quit smoking is one of the easiest things in the world. I must have done it over a dozen times." Anyone who has been a tobacco user for a long period of time knows exactly what Mark Twain was saying in this quote.

One day a friend of mine who was not a tobacco user asked me, "why do you do that?" I responded with the usual response, "It calms me down, and it has become a habit." He then challenged me to write down two lists, one list of the positive effects of tobacco and one of the negative. I accepted the challenge and wrote down the two lists. When I had finished my lists the negative effects outweighed the positives 3 to 1.

According to Ms. Gayle Kenyon, 97th Medical Operations Squadron health promotion educator,

- Tobacco use has a serious affect on military readiness. In a 1997 United States Air Force study, tobacco use accounted for 3,573 lost man-years due to sick time, breaks, and other lost duty time, which is equivalent to one Air Force Base, one Army Brigade, one Navy Carrier, or one Marine Corps Infantry Regiment. Tobacco's impact on readiness includes a 20-50 percent reduction in night vision, significant decrement in tracking longer reaction times, and an increased risk of musculoskeletal injuries. For deployed individuals who don't have access to tobacco products, rapid nicotine withdrawal adversely affects cognitive function and visual acuity.

The drivers that cause people to continue using tobacco are physical addiction, habit, and emotional events.

- When nicotine is taken into the body, within seconds it reaches the brain where it literally changes the way the brain works. Nicotine is not a habit. It is an addictive drug. Every time a drag is taken off a cigarette, that addiction is reinforced a little more. Smokeless tobacco is actually more addictive than cigarettes due to the continual absorption through the mouth tissues. Studies have shown that even after individuals have had no nicotine in their bodies for two years, the brain cells are still changed. This is why the cravings persist; the brain is telling the body that it needs a nicotine fix.

- The habitual component is separate from the nicotine affect. This has to do with daily routines. The ritual of using tobacco becomes engrained into people's lifestyles. It becomes a part of what is done automatically every day, like getting up in the morning and going to bed at night, taking a shower, dental hygiene or eating. Certain daily activities may become subconscious triggers to use tobacco. Though behavior change is possible, it is not always an easy task.

- People also use tobacco for emotional reason - during their highest highs and their lowest lows. It becomes a routine during times of intense emotion such as celebrations or coping with life's hardships; a stress reaction whether it is a positive stress or a negative stress.

The good news is quitting tobacco is not impossible and there are people and programs available to help you kick the habit.

The Health and Wellness Center offers a variety of options for tobacco cessation;

- **FreshStart** is a group class that begins the first Wednesday of each month and meets weekly for a total of four



ALTUS AIR FORCE BASE, Okla.--An Airman from the 97th Air Mobility Wing holds a cigarette outside of his place of work. According to the United States Marine Corps National Health Naval Research Center, Tobacco kills as many Americans as in all our wars combined. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Leandra D. Stepp)

sessions. This is the encouraged method for tobacco cessation as studies indicate a higher success rate for individuals who participate in some form of a group program.

- **Freedom from Smoking** is an online program available to individuals unable to attend the group classes.
- **Tough Enough to Quit** is specifically for smokeless tobacco users.
- **1-800-QUIT NOW** is the Oklahoma state quit line option.
- **San Antonio Military Medical Center Tobacco Quit Line Research Study** is being conducted by the University of Tennessee and Wilford Hall Medical Center.

Medications for assistance are available with the first three programs. The quit lines provide nicotine patches.

For information about programs available to help quit tobacco, contact the Health and Wellness Center at 481-5013.