

# Strategies for Selecting Smoking Cessation Programs

An interview with  
Marc Manley, M.D.,  
Smoking, Tobacco, and  
Cancer Program,  
National Cancer  
Institute

**Q:** Is smoking addictive?

**A:** Yes. According to the 1987 Surgeon General's report on smoking, nicotine is as addicting as cocaine or heroin. Cigarette smokers and drug users both develop a strong dependency and, when quitting, experience withdrawal symptoms. For smokers, these commonly include difficulty concentrating, irritability, mild headaches, and occasional insomnia.

**Q:** How should cessation programs deal with the addiction process?

**A:** Smoking begins as a behavioral habit that develops quickly into physical dependency. Cessation programs must recognize both these aspects: the psychological and the chemical.

**Q:** What does this mean for the company wanting to help its employees kick their cigarette habits?

**A:** It means quite clearly that companies should take *seriously* the nicotine addiction problem and be ready to help smokers overcome it. "Let smokers fend for themselves" is not an adequate response on the part of management.

**Q:** What techniques will an effective cessation program use?

**A:** Programs consisting of several treatment components or approaches are proving to be the most successful. In general, these include the following:

1. **Self-Help Materials.** Books, audiotapes and videotapes, leaflets, correspondence courses, and other aids (e.g., filters) help smokers quit using strategies that most appeal to them. These materials also reinforce the counseling suggestions given to smokers in structured programs.
2. **Behavioral Interventions.** Smoking is a behavior that people have incorporated into their lives. Behavioral methods help smokers replace old habits and patterns with new ones, develop coping skills for dealing with temptations, and manage self control. These approaches frequently emphasize group work.
3. **Physician Monitoring.** Physicians can play a critical role in smoking cessation programs by counseling patients about smoking in addition to keeping in touch with them, continuing to issue advice, and following up on their progress.
4. **Pharmacological Aids.** Nicotine substitutes in the form of gum prescribed by a physician help the smoker to fight the physical addiction separately from the psychological one. Other substances are available by prescription or over the counter, but are of unproven value in combating chemical addiction. Importantly, nicotine gum has been shown to be effective only when used in conjunction with a stop-smoking program, under the care of a health professional.

**Q:** With so many smoking cessation programs on the market, how does one choose?

**A:** Individuals need to examine their smoking habits and select the program best suited to their specific needs. Similarly, corporate smoking cessation programs should account for the great diversity of a smoking population. To maximize cessation success in a corporate situation, it is recommended that the medical staff guide employees to programs that offer a variety of strategies and provide training and followup.

**Q:** How much financial responsibility should the company take for its cessation program?

**A:** Healthy employees can save the company money in the long run. Offering the program



**Smoking  
Policy:  
Questions  
and  
Answers**

No. 3 in  
a series

2023668672