

## **Carroll working hard to quit smoking together**

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Laura Petersen

Despite mounting scientific evidence, growing social stigmas, increasing prices and legal bans, 43.4 million Americans still smoke cigarettes, accounting for 19.8 percent of the population, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Maryland is slightly below the national average with 17.1 percent of the population smoking, according to the CDC.

"From the latest reports we have from the Maryland Cigarette Restitution Fund Program, overall in Maryland and Carroll County, tobacco use has decreased since the year 2000, but Carroll County rates are higher than the state average for youth and adults," said Dawn Eldridge, community health educator for the Carroll County Health Department. "We're trying to head that off as much as we can."

Carroll County has seen a decrease in smokers within the past years, but still ranks above the national average.

Approximately 20 percent of the county's adult population uses tobacco products, Eldridge said, while 17 percent of county youths under the age of 18 use tobacco products, compared to the state average of 15 percent.

The effects of tobacco use can damage all parts of the body, not just the lungs, Eldridge said.

"The effects of smoking and tobacco use include damage to the heart, heart disease, cancer, stroke, lung disease, emphysema, depletes the oxygen supply, effects circulation and blood pressure," she said. "To name a few."

By now, with increased tobacco education in the form of public service announcements, common medical practice and prominent product warnings, most citizens are aware of the detrimental effects of tobacco use.

In this two-part series, The Advocate will examine new methods to help smokers quit, steps the county has taken to get tobacco products out of the hands of youth and ways residents can help to decrease tobacco use in the county.

### **Good to be a quitter**

New years marks a time for self improvement and for many adults, quitting smoking is top priority.

"There is no wrong time to quit," said Carroll County Health Department Tobacco Cessation Coordinator Susan Rinehart. "The time that's right is the time you're ready to quit."

Numerous free programs are available to those trying to quit through the Carroll County Health Department Cigarette Restitution Fund, which is funded through the state department of health and mental hygiene.

To get started, or refresh one's quitting plan, the health department offers Jump Start to Quitting, a two-hour program that provides tips on how to curb nicotine cravings and change tobacco use habits, Rinehart said.

"One of the hardest things is behavior modification," she said. "Instead of smoking a cigarette, take a walk, wash dishes —basically just [do] something else other than lighting up."

For a more intensive program, the health department offers a five-week plan in conjunction with Carroll Hospital Center called Stop Using Tobacco For Life. The group meets at the hospital for two hours, one day a week for five weeks at the hospital. Registration is required for both the Jump Start and Stop Using Tobacco For Life programs.

For those in need of a support group after they've quit using tobacco, the Health Department and Carroll Hospital Center offer a one-hour session called The Next Step Maintenance Program to assist participants in remaining tobacco free, or to help those who've relapsed regain control. The group meets the first Tuesday of every month at Carroll Hospital Center and registration is not required.

Additionally, the Department is introduced walk-in clinics in January to be held the third Thursday of every month at the health department.

"The walk-in clinics are designed for those who are ready to quit but can't make a program," Rinehart said. "We'll send them out with a packet of information and vouchers for nicotine replacement therapy."

Vouchers are available for nicotine patches, gum and lozenges as well as the new prescription medication, Chantix.

"As far as statistics go, people are more successful with adjunct therapy," Rinehart said. "With programs and nicotine replacement therapy, there is higher rate of success."

Those in need of vouchers could be granted up to \$30 for patches, gum and lozenges and \$120 for Chantix, but they must attend a program.

"Participants must come to one of the programs to get a voucher," Rinehart said. "Also, we are just giving out the vouchers. You need a prescription from a doctor to receive Chantix."

Relapse is common with addiction and those who need additional help are always welcome back, she said.

For those who are not ready to quit, certain habits should be modified, Rinehart said.

"Try not to smoke in your homes, your cars or around your children," she said. "But never try to force a person to quit, they'll quit when they're ready."

*Reach staff writer Laura Petersen at 410-857-3317 or [laura.petersen@eldersburgadvocate.com](mailto:laura.petersen@eldersburgadvocate.com).*

Advocate Staff Writer