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Title: Free Quit Smoking Program Increases Success by 700 per cent

Setting yourself up to fail is a lousy way to start the year yet countless smokers do exactly that when they resolve to quit cold turkey. But free help that will greatly increase your odds is just a call or a website away.

Quitting smoking is one of the top resolutions -- right up there with exercising and eating better. By mid-January the crowds at the gym start thinning out while the ashtrays outside of buildings start overflowing again.

The majority of people who smoke -- 3 out of 5 -- say they want to quit within the next 6 months and half will try. Only 4 per cent succeed without help. But a new federal government study shows that 28 per cent Ontarians who turn to the Smokers' Helpline, a free service that offers one-on-one coaching and support with zero judgement or guilt, manage to quit successfully.

Smokers' Helpline, funded by the Ontario government and run by the Canadian Cancer Society, is celebrating its 15th anniversary. Expert Quit Coaches are easy to call -- their number is printed right on every package of cigarettes. Interpreters are available for more than 100 languages, including First Nations, Inuit and Metis languages. You can even get text messages to provide encouragement at key times during the day to overcome cravings.

And as a little extra nudge for smokers to act on the urge to quit, Smokers' Helpline runs the First Week Challenge Contest, a monthly contest where you can win cash prizes for attempting to quit smoking.

Elana Trainoff, a smoker since 15, turned to Smokers' Helpline after having a heart attack last year at 40. She had no choice -- she needed to start living a healthy life, and the essential first step was quitting smoking.

"I knew how hard it is to overcome the addiction to tobacco. I tried going it alone then quickly realized I needed to get help," Trainoff says. "The people at Smokers' Helpline knew exactly what I was going through and provided the experience, expertise and encouragement to quit for good."

Feb. 1 marks one year of being smoke-free for Trainoff.

In addition to providing phone, online and texting support, Quit Coaches can also refer smokers to quitting services in their community. For example, many public health units offer free nicotine replacement therapy like patches or gum that double someone's chances of successfully quitting.

To learn more and connect with a Quit Coach, call 1-877-513-5333, or the number on cigarette packages, and visit www.SmokersHelpline.ca.

Sidebar 1:

4 Ds for dealing with cravings when quitting smoking:

- **Delay:** Most urges will go away in a few minutes.
- **Distract:** Take a walk, listen to music -- any shift in attention takes away most people's urges.
- **Deep Breathing:** Take two deep breaths, slowly & deeply. Many smokers only breathe deeply when they are smoking. Do you?
- **Drink water:** Drink it slowly and keep it in your mouth awhile.

Sidebar 2:

How can you help a smoker quit?

- Treat the quitter as a friend first, a smoker second.
- Be supportive and encouraging, not nagging or judgmental.
- Understand that quitting means changing attitudes and routines, not just stopping smoking.
- Realize that willpower is not always enough, and that supports are not a sign of weakness.
- Offer help, don't demand they take it.
- Call Smokers' Helpline toll-free at 1-877-513-5333 or visit www.SmokersHelpline.ca to learn more about how to help.