



Saint Anthony's Offers Stop Smoking Class Plus Screenings

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(Alton, IL) – Help is available for smokers who want to kick the habit permanently - through an upcoming smoking cessation program from Saint Anthony's Health Center. "Freedom from Smoking" starts with an orientation session on Monday, September 8 at 6 p.m. in the Auditorium of Saint Clare's Professional Building, 815 East Fifth Street.

"If someone wants to know *how* to quit, then this is the program to turn to," says Tina Bennett, a trained smoking cessation facilitator at Saint Anthony's. "We follow the American Lung Association's step-by-step process that includes information about quitting, recovery and support, stress management, weight control and relapse prevention."

Along with weekly class and group discussion, course participants receive health screenings. At the beginning and end of the session, free pulmonary function screenings to measure lung capacity are offered. "Once a person stops smoking, he or she will see a decrease in coughing and shortness of breath," says Bennett. The technology for the lung screening was obtained with a grant through The Alton Foundation.

Weekly pulse oximetry to measure a person's oxygen saturation in the blood, as well as blood pressure screenings are also featured. It has since long been known that blood pressure and heart rate increase during smoking, according to the National Institutes of Health. "The chemicals in tobacco can damage the lining of the artery walls, causing arteries to narrow, which results in increased blood pressure," Bennett adds.

Participants in the Freedom from Smoking program learn more about the effects of smoking, plus review their own personal commitment and readiness to quit smoking and reduce the hesitation towards quitting.

"Participants adjust to a new life that does not involve smoking," she says. "They learn how to handle cravings through various coping strategies."

In addition, an email account has been created to help smokers before and after sessions: helpmequit@sahc.org. “If anyone needs encouragement or has questions about their journey to being smoke-free, they can always reach me through this special email,” says Bennett.

Benefits of smoking cessation, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, include:

- *20 minutes after quitting:* Your heart rate drops to a normal level.
- *12 hours after quitting:* The carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- *Two weeks to three months after quitting:* Your risk of having a heart attack begins to drop; your lung function begins to improve.
- *One to nine months after quitting:* Your coughing and shortness of breath decrease.
- *One year after quitting:* Your added risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker’s risk.
- *Five to 15 years after quitting:* Your risk of having a stroke is reduced to that of a nonsmoker’s; your risk of getting cancer of the mouth, throat or esophagus is half that of a smoker.
- *10 years after quitting:* Your risk of dying from lung cancer is about half that of a smoker’s; your risk of getting bladder cancer is half that of a smoker’s; your risk of getting cervical cancer or cancer of the larynx, kidney or pancreas decreases.
- *15 years after quitting:* Your risk of coronary heart disease is the same as that of a nonsmoker.

To register or for more information about the eight-week Freedom from Smoking program, please call 618-465-2264.