

# This July, declare your independence from tobacco

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(Photo: Submitted photo)

The U.S. Surgeon General released its first report of the Advisory Committee on Smoking in Health in 1964, which identified smoking as a cause of lung cancer and chronic bronchitis. Despite significant progress since that first Surgeon General's report, issued over 50 years ago, smoking remains the single largest cause of preventable disease and death in the United States, and Licking County is no exception.

We now know that in the United States, smoking causes 87 percent of lung cancer deaths, 32 percent of coronary heart disease deaths, and 79 percent of all cases of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). One out of three cancer deaths are caused by smoking. Smoking causes colorectal and liver cancer and increases the failure rate of treatment for all cancers. Smoking also causes diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and immune system weakness, and increases the risk for tuberculosis disease and death, ectopic (tubal) pregnancy and impaired fertility, cleft lip and cleft palates in babies of women who smoke during early pregnancy, erectile dysfunction, and age-related macular degeneration.

Despite all the well-known risks of smoking and tobacco use, Ohio's smoking rate remains one of the highest in the US with 22.5 percent of Ohio adults smoking cigarettes in 2016, compared to only 15.5 percent nationwide. The reported smoking rate in Licking County is even higher, with 24 percent of adults smoking in 2015.

Nicotine in tobacco is addictive and makes quitting difficult. Over half of all smokers have attempted to quit at least once in the past year. While most former smokers quit without using one of treatments proven to be effective for smokers who want help to quit, there are tools to help smokers quit successfully. Some examples include getting advice and assistance from your doctor about quitting, participating in individual, group, or telephone counseling, and apps using mobile phones that support quit efforts. Medications for quitting have been found to be effective in increasing the likelihood of success including nicotine replacement products like patches and gum, and prescription medications.

Combining counseling with medication is the most effective way to increase your odds of quitting for good. This July declare your independence from tobacco/nicotine dependence. Quitting is a marathon, not a sprint, and it may take multiple attempts, but there is no reason to go it alone. Get help by using the treatments and resources for available to help you cross the finish line.

Free programs available include the Ohio Quit Line (1-800-QUIT-NOW), and the Licking County Health Department's Community Cessation Initiative (1-866-525-2132), which can make referrals to local group or individual counseling resources.

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