Quitting smoking: Three places to turn for help

If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and you smoke, quitting now is one of the best things you can do for your health. It can help slow the damage to your lungs.

Quitting smoking isn’t easy. It may take a few tries. The good news: You don’t have to do it on your own. If you need help to kick the habit, here are three ways to find support:

1. **Talk to your doctor.** Your doctor can offer resources and medicines to help you quit. There are several types of medicines. Your doctor can help you choose what’s right for you.

2. **Join a support group.** You’ll meet other people who want to stop smoking. It’s a chance to share encouragement and tips. Your doctor or hospital can help you find a support group that meets in person or online.

3. **Call a free quitline.** You can talk to experts on quitting smoking. They can help you make a plan to quit.

Call the National Cancer Institute’s smoking quitline at 1-877-44U-QUIT (1-877-448-7848).

Sources: American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org); COPD Foundation (www.copdfoundation.org); National Cancer Institute (www.smokefree.gov)

Steer clear of colds and other infections

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) puts a serious strain on the lungs. That's why, if you have COPD, it's especially important to avoid lung infections, like colds and the flu.

A lung infection can make you very sick. It can cause your COPD symptoms to suddenly get worse. It can even lead to a hospital stay.

How to stay well
To help prevent infections:
• Get a flu shot every year. Ask your doctor if you need a pneumonia shot too.
• If you smoke, ask your doctor for help to quit. Smoking makes you more prone to infections — and it damages your lungs.
• Wash your hands often. Scrub with soap and water. If you are away from a sink, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
• Don’t get too close to sick people. Ask visitors not to come around when they’re ill. Try to avoid crowds during cold and flu season.
• Keep up healthy habits. Eating well, exercising and getting plenty of sleep can help your body fight off germs.

Catch it quickly
What if you do get sick? Talk to your doctor right away if you have a fever or your COPD symptoms seem to be getting worse.

Sources: American Lung Association (www.lung.org); American Thoracic Society (www.thoracic.org); National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

Have a question about your medicines? Ask your doctor. Whether they're for COPD symptoms or related issues, like quitting smoking, all medicines work best when you take them the way your doctor says.

It’s not too late!
A yearly flu shot is the best way to protect yourself from the flu. The vaccine is safe and won’t cause the flu. If you haven’t had the flu shot yet, it’s not too late to get it. Ask your doctor or pharmacist.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

Three questions to ask your doctor about opioids
Opioids can be dangerous when overused or abused. Before you take an opioid, ask your doctor:
1. Why do I need it?
2. What are the risks?
3. Are there safer options?
Ask about Narcan too. It’s a medicine that could save your life if you overdose.

Need help getting clean? To find treatment near you, call 1-800-662-4357.

Sources: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (www.samhsa.gov); U.S. Food and Drug Administration (www.fda.gov)

Did you know that you may be able to get Lifeline cell service plus a smartphone at no cost to you? Go to www.MercyCareAZ.org or call Member Services at 1-800-624-3879 (TTY: 711) and ask about the Assurance Wireless Lifeline program.

Caregivers: Seek the help you deserve
If you are a caregiver, ask your loved one’s care manager about their needed services as well as services you might need as a caregiver. For example, you may feel overwhelmed, sad or burned out. The care manager can provide information and referrals for support.