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Joining the Ranks of Former Smokers

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http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-howard-k-koh/post_2663_b_1100033.html 

Did you know that former smokers now outnumber current smokers in the United States? Most Americans may be surprised to hear this, because they know how hard it is to quit. But your chances of succeeding have never been better. This may be the perfect time to join the growing ranks of Americans -- approximately 50 million -- who have quit smoking and regained a fighting chance for health.

Growing evidence reaffirms that effective, science-based treatments can boost a smoker's motivation to quit and dramatically increase the odds of success. That's great news since most of the nation's 45 million smokers want another shot at health for themselves and their families. In fact, a recent analysis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention determined that [two-thirds of American smokers](#) report a desire to quit and more than half tried to free themselves from this dependence during the past year. Most tried to quit without the benefit of any counseling or medication -- but fewer than 5 percent of smokers who try to quit "cold turkey" succeed.

Studies show that smokers motivated to quit can dramatically increase their likelihood of success by using both counseling and medication. A number of Food and Drug Administration-approved medications are now available to help people stop smoking. And counseling is just a toll-free call away: Anyone, anywhere in the United States, can call 1-800-QUITNOW and talk with a trained counselor-coach who will assist them in the process of breaking free of tobacco dependence.

Smoking and exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke kill an estimated [443,000 Americans](#) each year. But as a physician, I can tell you that the benefits of quitting begin immediately. Within one day of quitting, your levels of carbon monoxide begin to drop, providing your body with more oxygen. Within a month, your breathing capacity will substantially improve, so you can move faster and go farther without getting so out of breath. Within a year, your risk of a heart attack will decline by up to 50 percent.

And there is more good news: Increasing numbers of employers now include evidence-based smoking cessation efforts, including counseling and medications, in their health benefit packages.

The federal government, as one indication of the Obama Administration's commitment to ending the tobacco epidemic, now provides comprehensive tobacco cessation coverage through its health plans to all its approximately 8 million employees, their dependents and retirees.

And the Affordable Care Act, our nation's new health care reform law, requires new private health plans to offer coverage of tobacco cessation interventions to subscribers without cost-sharing. Medicare now covers tobacco use cessation counseling for all beneficiaries (not just those with tobacco-related illnesses). And Medicaid provides tobacco cessation coverage to pregnant enrollees.

Join the ranks of former smokers today. For free resources and tips on how to quit smoking, call 1-800-QUITNOW or visit <http://www.hhs.gov>.