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# History of the Great American Smokeout Event

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## What is the Great American Smokeout?

For more than 40 years, the American Cancer Society has hosted the Great American Smokeout on the third Thursday of November. The Great American Smokeout is an opportunity for people who smoke to commit to healthy, smoke-free lives – not just for a day, but year round. The Great American Smokeout provides an opportunity for individuals, community groups, businesses, health care providers, and others to encourage people to use the date to make a plan to quit, or plan in advance and initiate a smoking cessation plan on the day of the event. The Great American Smokeout event challenges people to stop smoking and helps people learn about the many tools they can use to help them quit and stay quit.

## It's hard to quit tobacco

Addiction to nicotine in cigarettes is one of the strongest and most deadly addictions one can have. Quitting is hard for many people who smoke. It takes commitment and starts with a plan, often takes more than one quit attempt, and requires a lot of support. Often, the younger you were when you started to smoke, the more intense the addiction.

People who smoke are strongly advised to use proven cessation methods, such as

prescription medications and counseling, to quit smoking. It's a good idea to talk to your doctor or pharmacist to get their advice.

Research shows that people who smoke are most successful in their efforts to stop smoking when they have support, such as:

- Telephone quitlines
- American Cancer Society Freshstart Program
- Nicotine Anonymous meetings
- Self-help books and materials
- Smoking counselors or coaches
- Encouragement and support from friends and family members

Using 2 or more of these measures to quit smoking works better than using any one of them alone. For example, some people use a [prescription medicine](#)<sup>1</sup> along with [nicotine replacement](#)<sup>2</sup>. Other people may use as many as 3 or 4 of the methods listed above. Professional guidance can help you choose the approach that's right for you.

## The American Cancer Society can help

Quitting may not be easy, but you can do it and the American Cancer Society can help. The American Cancer Society is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide support, from questions about quitting smoking to looking for national or local resources to help you quit. To find out more, visit [cancer.org/smokeout](http://cancer.org/smokeout) or call 1-800-227-2345.

## How the Great American Smokeout began

The Great American Smokeout event has helped dramatically change Americans' attitudes about smoking. These changes have led to community programs and smoke-free laws that are now saving lives across the country. Annual Great American Smokeout events began in the 1970s, when smoking and secondhand smoke were common.

The idea for the Great American Smokeout grew from a 1970 event in Randolph, Massachusetts, at which Arthur P. Mullaney asked people to give up cigarettes for a day and donate the money they would have spent on cigarettes to a high school scholarship fund.

Then in 1974, Lynn R. Smith, editor of the *Monticello Times* in Minnesota, spearheaded the state's first D-Day, or Don't Smoke Day.

The idea caught on, and on November 18, 1976, the California Division of the American Cancer Society got nearly 1 million people who smoke to quit for the day. That California event marked the first official Smokeout, and the American Cancer Society took it nationwide in 1977. Since then, there have been dramatic changes in the way the public views tobacco advertising and tobacco use. Many public places and work areas are now smoke-free – this protects people who don't smoke and supports people who smoke who want to quit.

## **The Great American Smokeout event helps fuel new laws and save lives**

Each year, the Great American Smokeout event draws attention to preventing the deaths and chronic illnesses caused by smoking. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, many state and local governments responded by banning smoking in workplaces and restaurants, raising taxes on cigarettes, limiting cigarette promotions, discouraging teen cigarette use, and taking further action to counter smoking. These efforts continue today.

Because of the many individuals and groups that have led smoke-free advocacy efforts, there have been significant landmarks in the areas of research, policy, and the environment:

- **1977:** Berkeley, California, became the first community to limit smoking in restaurants and other public places.
- **1983:** San Francisco passed the first strong workplace smoking restrictions, eliminating smoking in private workplaces.
- **1990:** The federal smoke-free law for all domestic flights of 6 hours or less took effect
- **1994:** Mississippi filed the first of 24 state lawsuits seeking to recuperate millions of dollars from tobacco companies for smoking-related illnesses paid for by Medicaid.
- **1994:** ABC News reported for the first time that cigarette companies manipulated the nicotine in their products to cause and sustain addiction in people who smoke.
- **1994:** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) opened an historic investigation into the tobacco industry's manipulation of nicotine and targeting of children in advertising and promotion.
- **1999:** The Department of Justice filed suit against cigarette manufacturers, charging the industry with defrauding the public by lying about the risks of smoking.
- **1999:** the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) was passed, requiring tobacco companies to pay \$206 billion to 45 states by the year 2025 to cover Medicaid

costs of treating people who smoke. The MSA agreement also closed the Tobacco Institute and ended cartoon advertising and tobacco billboards.

- **2009:**The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act was signed into law. It gives the FDA the authority to regulate the sale, manufacturing, and marketing of tobacco products and protects children from the tobacco industry's marketing practices.
- **2017:** More than 11 years after a federal court first ordered them to do so, the major U.S. tobacco companies began publishing "corrective statement" advertisements telling the American people the truth about their deadly and addictive products. Tobacco companies had to publish corrective statements in the nation's top-selling newspapers from November 2017 to April 2018, according to the court ruling. The court also required corrective statements to air on major television networks from November 2017 to November 2018. The American Cancer Society, along with other public health groups, played a major role as an intervenor in the Justice Department's litigation against Big Tobacco.

Those states with strong tobacco control laws are now reaping the fruits of their labor. From 1965 to 2016, cigarette smoking among adults in the United States decreased from 42% to about 15.5%. Strong smoke-free policies, media campaigns, and increases in the prices of tobacco products are at least partly credited for these decreases.

While cigarette smoking rates have dropped, about 37.8 million Americans smoke cigarettes. About half of all Americans who keep smoking will die because of their smoking. Each year more than 480,000 people in the United States die from illnesses caused by smoking. This means each year smoking causes about 1 out of 5 deaths in the US

Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of cancer death in the United States, accounting for 29% of all cancer deaths. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death. Smoking also causes cancers of the larynx (voice box), mouth, sinuses, pharynx (throat), esophagus (swallowing tube), and bladder. It also has been linked to the development of cancers of the pancreas, cervix, ovary (mucinous), colon/rectum, kidney, stomach, and some types of leukemia. Cigars and pipes cause cancers, too.

Fortunately, the past few decades have seen great strides in changing attitudes about smoking, understanding nicotine addiction, and learning how to help people quit. Today, the American Cancer Society Great American Smokeout event is celebrated with rallies, parades, stunts, quitting information, and even "cold turkey" menu items in schools, workplaces, Main streets, and legislative halls throughout the US.

Visit [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) to learn more about quitting smoking, improving your health, or getting involved with the Great American Smokeout in your community. Or simply call the American Cancer Society any time at 1-800-227-2345.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/prescription-drugs-to-help-you-quit-smoking.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/prescription-drugs-to-help-you-quit-smoking.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/nicotine-replacement-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/nicotine-replacement-therapy.html)

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Last Revised: September 11, 2018

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