

Great American Smokeout – Nov. 19

By Margaret Williams

Smoking cigarettes is the No. 1 preventable cause of premature disease and death in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Great American Smokeout, which is an annual nationwide celebration on Nov. 19, challenges smokers to give up tobacco for 24 hours in hopes that they will stop smoking for good.

“The health benefits of quitting smoking are significant,” said Christy Kessler, supervising health education coordinator for the El Dorado County Health Services Department. “A smoker who quits reduces his or her risk of developing smoking-related heart disease, stroke, cancer and emphysema.”

An estimated 14 percent of Californians are smokers. According to Kessler, most smokers have thought about quitting at some point in their lives. Taking part in the Great American Smokeout is a good starting point for smokers who want to quit.

Kessler recommends the following techniques for quitting:

- * Deep Breathing – Take a few deep breaths by inhaling and exhaling slowly to help the body relax and relieve stress.
- * Drink Water – Drink eight glasses of water every day to help rid the body of harmful cigarette toxins.
- * Do Something Else – Distract yourself by taking a walk, reading a book or chewing on sugarless gum, cinnamon sticks or a straw.

* Delay – Wait! The urge to smoke will pass within 5-10 minutes and will become weaker over time.

* Discuss – Talk to a friend to get support and encouragement.

Kessler acknowledges that quitting smoking can be challenging, and advises that people who want to quit not give up.

“Sometimes it may take several tries before you are able to quit smoking for good, but taking that first step is critical,” said Kessler.

A number of resources are available to assist people who want to quit tobacco. The California Smokers’ Helpline, 1-800-NO-BUTTS, offers free over-the-phone counseling and online support at www.californiasmokershelpline.org. The American Cancer Society also has stop smoking resources on their website at www.cancer.org. For additional educational resources please visit the El Dorado County Tobacco Use Prevention Program website at www.edcgov.us/publichealth.

Margaret Williams works for the El Dorado County Health Department.