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Butting out has its budget rewards

By Denise Ryan December 31, 2008



Sandra Baier saved the money she once paid for cigarettes for a trip.

Photograph by : Glenn Baglo, Vancouver Sun

Getting out of debt is the No. 1 resolution folks will be making for 2009. According to a Franklin Covey survey, people also want to develop a new healthy habit and break at least one unhealthy habit.

To successfully get out of debt, smokers who successfully quit have a leg up -- by breaking the habit they'll free up an average of about \$8 a day. According to a new study by the Ohio State University Center for Human Research, non-smokers' net worth is a full 50 per cent higher than that of smokers. The wealth gap between smokers and non-smokers continues to grow by approximately four per cent for each year a smoker continues the habit.

Rachel Shoniker, a holistic smoking-cessation expert whose company Revitalize Now helps smokers quit using a low-power laser on acupuncture points and a body detoxification program, sees a bump in client enrolment every January.

"The goal of achieving a healthier budget dovetails nicely with that of a healthier body when the resolution is to quit smoking," she says.

Although the program costs \$375, she points out that among her clients, "The average smoker was smoking about a pack or more per day, spending about \$70 a week, \$280 a month."

Her client Sandra Baier, 48, who was successful using the Revitalize Now program, said the investment she made on the treatments paid off big-time. She's been smoke-free for over a year now. Baier doesn't even want to estimate how much money went up in smoke with her one-to-two pack a day habit over the years.

"I started smoking as a teenager when cigarettes were 54 cents a pack. After a while it's like buying milk or orange juice. I wouldn't even look at the price."

When Baier quit, she helped motivate herself by putting away the money she would have spent on cigarettes into a trip fund, and used it toward a holiday in Australia.

The B.C. Lung Association is getting on board with a major financial incentive to those brave enough to make quitting smoking their resolution this year. They are offering up to \$10,000 in cash prizes to quitters who can prove they've successfully ditched the nicotine.

The rules are simple. You must be over 19, and able to prove you've been smoking tobacco for at least a year. Select a "quit buddy," someone that can verify that you were a smoker, and commit to quitting for at least four weeks, from Jan. 6, 2009 through Feb. 2, 2009.

Potential winners of four \$2,500 prizes and the \$10,000 grand prize must be willing to submit to a urine test and a carbon monoxide breathalyser to verify their tobacco-free status. Register online at www.quitnow.ca.

Quitting is never easy, as Sandra Baier can attest. "I tried everything -- cold turkey, Zyban, the patch. Nothing worked." Baier says she was smoking right up till the moment she walked into Shoniker's office for her first treatment. "I haven't smoked since," she says. "And I had no withdrawal symptoms on the program."

"We use a combination of the laser to reduce the physical cravings, and a habit replacement plan, a stop smoking CD to reduce the mental cravings and follow up consultations that are free for a one-year program," says Shoniker.

Baier still rings Shoniker up for an occasional phone consultation. "Stress is a trigger," she says. "But my life is so much better now. I can taste things, my hair doesn't reek of smoke, my fingers don't smell of cigarettes, my apartment doesn't have that lingering odour, I don't have the ashtray-mouth in the morning.

"I could probably have bought a new car with the money I spent on cigarettes." Baier figures the money she invested in quitting was worth it -- she has since saved thousands of dollars on cigarettes.