

Quitting successfully

There are tools and support mechanisms available to help you give up smoking that you may not be aware of, writes **Alison Moore**

QUITE simply, nicotine is one of the most addictive substances a human can take into their system. It works by stimulating the central nervous system, increasing the body's heart rate, blood pressure and metabolism. When you take a drag on a cigarette, you will experience the effects of nicotine in under eight seconds.

When inhaled, it also briefly releases the body from craving, while reinforcing the need to smoke. Each cigarette smoked reinforces the craving for the next one. It's a vicious circle, but it can be broken.

The reasons to give up are numerous and well-known so we won't re-invent the wheel by listing them here. Some people simply make the decision not to smoke again and just stop. Others find it better to reduce their consumption gradually before stopping entirely. Whatever your approach, strong willpower is essential to ensure that you don't slip back into old habits. Whichever route you decide to go down there are various helping hands and crutches that you can make use of.

If you own a smartphone then there is a veritable plethora of 'apps' that are available to help you kick the habit. A quick search of Apple's App Store found more than 80 applications designed to support your attempts to stop smoking. Most of these were free of charge, so there is no risk in giving them a go, and some are versions of tired and trusted tools such as Alan Carr's *Easy way to Stop Smoking*, which was priced at €5.99 to download to your phone.

Apps, such as 'Quit Pro', which is free to download, help you to by keeping you motivated, monitoring your progress,

showing you the money you are saving and the benefits to your health as you cut down and give up entirely.

There are also apps that work in conjunction with nicotine replacement therapies. Depending on your stage in the process – being ready to quit or thinking about it – the Nicorette ActiveStop iPhone app (pictured bottom right), for example, takes you through a health benefits timeline and offers information on things that might hold you back from giving up smoking such as the fear of weight gain, withdrawal and managing cravings. When you enter data on how long you have been smoking and how much you smoke, the app will track your smoke-free days, how many cigarettes you have not smoked that you normally would have, how many puffs you have not taken and how much money you have saved.

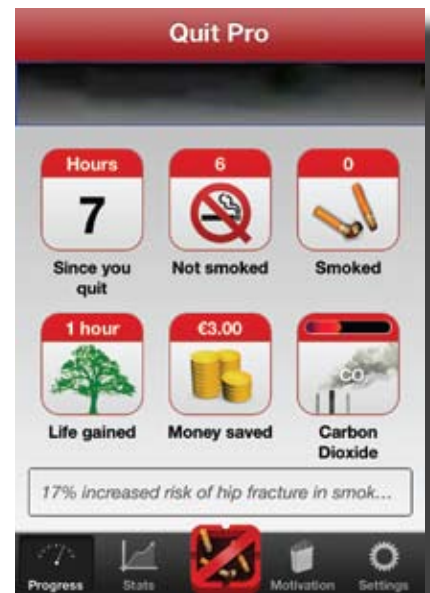
The app also has some fun features, providing you with 24-hour advice and support. Most smokers trying to quit report that one of the worst effects of giving up was not knowing what to do with their hands. To combat this, the app includes puzzles and games to keep your hands busy and distract you until your craving passes. You can also set up playlists of music that can calm, distract, motivate or soothe as required. You can also enter a personal list of eight things to remind yourself of should you find yourself reaching for a cigarette.

If social media is more your thing, the HSE has set up 'You Can Quit' on Facebook. Run by HSE staff, the page is a forum for chat, questions, advice and tips that have worked for other. It is also supported by

experts in smoking cessation who work full-time helping people to quit.

Twitter addicts can post or search under the hashtag #quitsmoking to share experiences and take inspiration from those in the same situation, wherever in the world you may be.

There is no 'quick fix' to



quitting smoking however. If you want to give up for good you need to take a closer look at your smoking and understand why you smoke.

Making the decision to give up, and changing your lifestyle are the most important things you can do but after that, why not use every avenue open to you to help stay focused on your goal and support you through the more difficult times on that journey.

