Dear Alice,

My boyfriend smokes a lot and I really don't like it. I'm afraid if I ask him to stop he will break up with me or get stressed and smoke more. What shall I do?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Smoking can be a real drag (pun intended), especially if someone you care about isn't ready to quit. Since you haven't brought the subject up to your boyfriend yet, you don't know how he will react — so your first step may be to talk with him. Your concerns may be the final push he needs to help him quit! However, you may want to prepare yourself that he may choose to continue smoking. If this occurs, then you both might want to reevaluate the relationship (including if the smoking is a true deal breaker). In addition to simply encouraging your boyfriend to give up smoking, if he chooses to quit you can offer him lots of resources and support to help him through this difficult process. The American Cancer Society’s Guide to Quitting Smoking [2] and smokefree.gov [3] are helpful resources with comprehensive step-by-step instructions on how to quit.

So, how might you start this conversation? Ease into the conversation gently and keep your tone neutral. Have a clear message (“I'm worried about how much you smoke and I'd like to help you quit) and maintain sight of your goal. However, be mindful that you don't come off as combative or aggressive. Respect that this is your boyfriend’s decision to make. Quitting is a lifestyle change that requires dedication — he has to want this for himself. If he decides he’s not ready to quit, you’ll have to evaluate whether this relationship is worth working for and if this is a compromise you’re willing to make.

If your boyfriend chooses to quit, it’s recommended to address both the physical and psychological aspects of the addiction. Nicotine withdrawal can be very challenging, but there are many options out there to help! Nicotine gums, lozenges, and patches can help to relieve physical symptoms of withdrawal. In terms of the mental aspects of quitting, stress and other psychological concerns are often reasons people start smoking in the first place. Your boyfriend may find it helpful to meet with a health promotion or cessation specialist to discuss healthier
choices and stress relieving techniques to replace this unhealthy habit. Take a gander at Smoking withdrawal symptoms and how to quit [4] in the Go Ask Alice! archives for more detailed information.

Want more tips and tricks to support your boyfriend if he makes the decision to quit? Consider the following options:

- **Help your boyfriend commit to a quit date.** The quit date should be far enough in advance to make appropriate preparations, but soon enough that he doesn’t talk himself out of it.
- **Assist with preparing his living space to be smoke-free — before** his quit date. Toss ashtrays and lighters and prohibit smoking in any part of the house or vehicles.
- **Check in frequently.** Ask your boyfriend how he’s doing, and if he’s experiencing a craving, help refocus him with smoke-free stress-reducing [5] activities, such as going on a nice bike ride or going out to eat at a smoke-free restaurant.
- **Surprise your sweetie with a supportive care package.** Fill a box up with nicotine gum, stress balls, hard candies, toothpicks, motivational stickers or greeting cards, bottles of water, and any other goodies that may benefit your boyfriend in his efforts to quit.
- **Help him avoid situations that may trigger the urge to smoke.** By staying away from places and people that tempt him to smoke, your boyfriend will have fewer opportunities to relapse.
- **Avoid giving advice.** Regardless of your good intentions, your boyfriend may feel like he’s being nagged, scolded, or patronized. Instead, ask him what he thinks you can do to help and listen with an open mind. With this tip, be willing to accept that he wants to do it on his own.
- **Try your best to be compassionate,** particularly if your boyfriend experiences mood swings throughout the process of quitting. Nicotine withdrawal can be incredibly difficult to cope with and it’s not personal.
- **Be positive!** Offer rewards as he achieves incremental successes. For example, after a full 24 hours of not smoking, honor his achievement by taking him out to a movie or giving him a neck massage. After a whole smoke-free week, treat him to his favorite meal or arrange a celebration with his friends and family.
- **Lend a hand to help him back on the bandwagon if needed.** If your boyfriend slips up, help lift his spirits and get back on track by reminding him of previous achievements — for example, “You were able to go a whole week without tobacco before and I know you can do it again.” Show him that you have faith in him, and remind him that it may take smokers a few tries before they’re able to quit for good.
- **Let him know you support him throughout the whole process.** Cravings can occur weeks and months after quitting and your help and support through the whole process could be what he needs to help him be successful!

Quitting cigarettes requires long-term commitment and perseverance. If he chooses to quit, try to be patient as this process may take a while. Unfortunately, there’s no magic pill to rid your boyfriend of his addiction, but quitting is possible and well worth the effort. If you are still looking for information and support, check out Convincing someone to give up smoking [6] in the Go Ask Alice! archives or smokefree.gov’s How to Support Your Quitter [7].
Related questions

E-cigarettes — Effects on health? Smoking cessation tool? [14]
I'm worried about my friend's escalating drug use [15]
Healthy versus unhealthy relationships [16]
Quitting smoking = depression? [17]
Weight gain and quitting smoking [18]

Resources

Tobacco Cessation (Morningside) [19]
Alice! Health Promotion (Morningside) [20]
Addiction Information & Management Strategies (AIMS) (CUIMC) [21]
Center for Student Wellness (CUIMC) [22]

Published date:
Sep 20, 2013
Last reviewed on:
Nov 25, 2016

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