

RAMADAN: A MONTH TO QUIT TOBACCO

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On current smoking patterns, tobacco will kill about 1 billion people worldwide this century¹. In Pakistan approximately 5,000 smokers are hospitalized every day and over 100,000 die every year due to tobacco-related diseases. In spite of this, over 50% of adult population in the country use some form of tobacco².

The holy month of Ramadan offers tobacco users a great opportunity to quit this addiction as people refrain from food, drinks and tobacco use from dawn to dusk. "Quit Tobacco Day" is being held on the first of Ramadan throughout the Muslim world including Pakistan. Every year millions of muslims get rid to tobacco addiction during this most prestigious month of Islamic calendar.

One of the important benefits of fasting is the sense of discipline that it instills in an individual which can help in avoiding bad habits, especially tobacco addiction. Human body is a gift of Allah and no one has a right to destroy it by consuming tobacco or any other addictive substances. In the Qur'an, we read: "Do not cast your own hands to destruction." (Al-Baqarah:195).

Scientific research shows that smoking not only reduces the life expectancy of an individual, but it also affects the quality of life. Today tobacco use is the single largest risk factor for the non-communicable diseases in Pakistan including cancer, heart attack, stroke and COPD. In addition smoking is a major risk factor for pneumonia and TB in the country.

Majority of tobacco users in Pakistan think about quitting when they suffer from a serious illness like heart attack, cancer or advanced lung disease. This is the reason why in Pakistan current smoker's percentage is higher than ex-smokers. In the developed world majority of smokers today are ex-smokers, rather than current smokers, because government took various measures and as a result smoking is now considered

socially unacceptable.

Young people when healthy, seldom think about of quitting this habit. Owing to nicotine dependency, when tobacco user tries to stop its use, most smokers experience withdrawal symptoms, like irritability, anger, restlessness, impatience, insomnia and difficulty concentrating. These nicotine withdrawal symptoms can be easily controlled by will power and by use of certain medicines, like bupropion, varenicline and nicotine replacement therapy³. In any case most of these withdrawal symptoms last for only 2 weeks or so.

Will power is the key to quit tobacco use. It is the will power that help muslim smokers who fast during Ramadan to refrain themselves from food, drinks and smoking during the daytime to fulfill their religious obligation of fasting during this month. Those who cannot quit tobacco use just by will power can approach their physicians for help.

Smokers need to remember that "urge to smoke" last for 5 minutes only. After Iftar smoker should go to mosque for Maghrib prayers, this will help reduce the urge and thus their chances of relapse. Not a "single cigarette" after the 1st Ramadan is the key message for all smokers who are planning to quit this Ramadan. Those smokers who think that by reducing the number of cigarettes, they will succeed in quitting are usually not successful in quitting this deadly addiction.

There is troubling evidence that the tobacco industry is exerting undue influence in several Asian countries including Pakistan, in some cases with the complicity of governments, to thwart public health measures⁴. In this scenario physicians have a greater responsibilities in tobacco control efforts than what they are doing at present time. First of all we as a physician must set good example for our patients and members of general public by being non-tobacco user our self. The credibility of

anti-tobacco message is lost if general public sees their doctors smoking. As physicians we should make every effort to guide all tobacco users in the country to quit tobacco use this Ramadan and start a healthy life. May Allah help us to spend Ramadan in line with teachings of our beloved Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

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