

## **Smoking Cessation and Weight Gain: facts and Recommendations**

- 1. Smokers weigh seven lbs. less than non-smokers, on the average. Individuals who stop smoking gain 5 lbs., on the average, with considerable individual variability. Some people may not gain any weight; a small percentage report gaining 20 lbs. or more.*
- 2. Both physiological and behavioral factors contribute to this weight gain. Nicotine appears to affect metabolism and appetite. Smoking deadens taste buds. Withdrawal of nicotine may slow metabolism, increase appetite and increase craving for sweets. Food may taste better. Due to the change in metabolism, some individuals may gain small amounts of weight even if they do not eat more.*
- 3. Behavioral patterns play an important role in weight gain. Typical patterns can include substitution of eating for smoking; increased intake of high sweet, high fat snacks; and use of food instead of cigarettes as a way to manage negative feelings, such as anxiety, boredom, anger or depression. If these changes occur and persist, then excess weight gain is much more likely.*

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. Assess which factors seem to be contributing to weight gain. An increased craving or sweets? Eating more snacks in general? Larger portions at meals? Eating compulsively to deal with negative feelings? Then assist the patient to make a plan designed to help with those problem situations.*
- 2. If a craving for sweets is a problem, such cravings are often satisfied with very small amounts of sweets, such as hard candies or by chewing gum. There are relatively few calories in these, and the cravings appear to diminish with time. Even sugariess candy or gum, may help. Most problems occur when cravings for sweets are met by eating high caloric sweets. Non-sweet foods, such as carrot sticks, may help substitute for a need to have something in one's mouth, but do not necessarily satisfy a sweet craving.*
- 3. If part of the problem is needing to keep your hands busy or something in the mouth then there are other choices besides food. Fiddling with an object, doodling, keeping a toothpick handy, chewing gum, cinnamon sticks, or having a beverage readily available near a work area may be better substitutes.*
- 4. If compulsive eating becomes a substitute for smoking in order to deal with negative emotions, then it is even more important to learn other methods, by using a relaxation technique, attending a weight management class, or seeking counseling.*
- 5. Exercise, if it is possible to do it in a regular manner, can help in a number of ways. Exercise can counter the purely metabolic effects of stopping smoking, and it can be very rewarding to become more active as breathing capacity improves. Many people also find exercise helpful to manage how they are feeling emotionally.*

