

# CHOICES

Consumers Helping  
Others Improve  
Their Condition by  
Ending Smoking

CHOICES NEWSLETTER - December 2023

Volume 17 Issue II

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## It's Worth A Chance To Protect Your Health

by Cleo Zifovski

When patients enter inpatient psychiatric treatment, only 20% are offered tobacco counseling and/or Nicotine Replacement Therapy. Despite extensive screening tools, therapy for tobacco addiction is limited [1]. A proposal has been made to treat tobacco addiction in the same manner that other drug abuse is treated, with a person being screened, examined, diagnosed, treated, and then referred to an FDA-approved tobacco medication and behavioral treatment program[1]. Tobacco has a long and tumultuous history. Tobacco cultivation began in about 6000 BC in the Americas. Since then, tobacco has had a disastrous and abusive relationship with the rest of the globe. This was not always true. Because indigenous tobacco had no nicotine, Native Americans seldom smoked it in the first century BC. Tobacco was used to treat bad breath and cancer in the 1500s, yet it was not smoked. Nicotine, on the other hand, was discovered in 1826, and Philip Morris invented the cigarette in 1847. And dangerous smoking began--first with soldiers who smoked during World War I and II, then with women during the Roaring Twenties, and so on with various groups.

Continued on page 4

## What is Wrong with Menthol Cigarettes?

by Lisa Evans

Discussing the pending menthol ban with menthol smokers has been an exercise in futility.

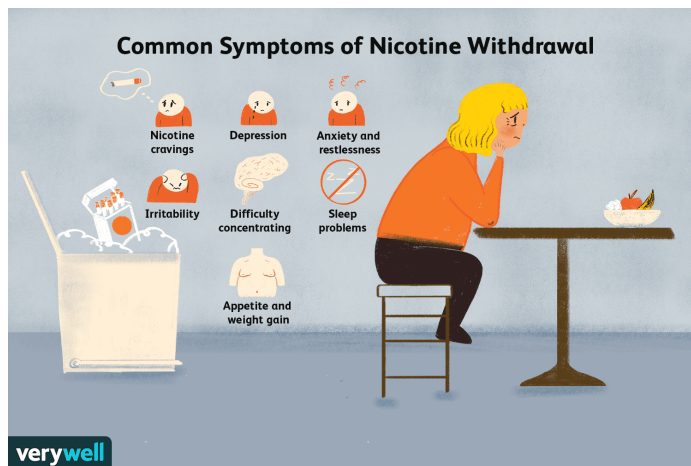
Menthol smokers in New Jersey are aware of the potential for a ban but they know that menthol flavoring isn't deadly. They know that regardless of menthol

or non-mentholated cigarettes smoked, health consequences are bleak for smokers. Then why target menthol cigarettes when other cigarettes are just as bad, they ask? Continued on page 5



## Coping with Nicotine Withdrawal

by Trish Dooley Budsock



One of the things that makes quitting smoking quite challenging is the withdrawal syndrome a smoker experiences when they have their last cigarette. This graphic, from [verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com), illustrates some of the most common challenges a smoker may experience, and there are others less commonly experienced. The first several days of quitting are often quite challenging, due to symptoms like intense cravings, irritability, and decreased concentration. Sometimes people even report feelings of depression and anxiety, which can be very scary for a smoker who has ever struggled with a mental health condition.

The GOOD news is that the withdrawal from nicotine doesn't last forever, AND, you can help to minimize some of these uncomfortable feelings by using Nicotine Replacement, such as the Nicotine Patch, Lozenge, or Gum, which are available over the counter. There are also prescriptions available, including the Nicotine Nasal spray, Varenicline (Chantix) and Bupropion (Wellbutrin). Many insurance plans cover these products, even the OTC ones, so it's worth checking in with your insurance company.

If you're unable to pay and don't have insurance, it would be worth it for you to

Continued on page 5

## Celebrities Make Smoking Look Cool

By Deidre Stenard

Recently, at a Beyoncé Renaissance Tour concert, Timothée Chalamet lit up a cigarette and kissed Kylie Jenner. It was noticed by so many people that there was a huge social media reaction and also articles in the news about it, mostly critical of his choice to smoke and how it might affect youth. Timothée is a popular American and French actor who recently hosted Saturday Night Live on November 11, 2023. Kylie Jenner is a well-known Reality TV actress. According to studies, young people 18-25 are particularly influenced by celebrities---what they do, what they wear, what they say and who they are dating. They are seeing celebrities like Timothée smoke and they think it is cool.

“Celebrities are influencers—for good or bad. Those young people who think smoking is OK because of who they see smoking are getting a pull toward trying cigarettes.” said Lynn Kozlowski, Dean Emeritus for the School of Public Health at SUNY Buffalo. He also says that “trying cigarettes could lead to being a smoker who dies prematurely because of smoking, 60% of the time.”

In addition to celebrities looking cool, television advertising was influential going back 50 plus years. Cigarettes were legally advertised on television until January 1971.

Growing up, I had the experience of seeing

Virginia Slims advertised on television.

There was a cool looking woman smoking a cigarette with the



Continued on page 4

## 'Mindfulness, Distress Tolerance and Smoking'

by Azeem Sitabkhan

I've been writing a series of articles on the benefits of mindfulness in helping with cigarette smoking cravings and withdrawal. Today I will touch on something called 'distress tolerance' and how it relates to this topic.

The term 'distress tolerance' refers to a person's ability to manage an emotional incident without feeling overwhelmed. Now, how is this related to mindfulness you ask? Well, mindfulness essentially refers to two skills used in conjunction with one another: the first being 'awareness' or one's ability to observe, and the second being 'equanimity' or radical acceptance. In other words, mindfulness refers to observing a situation or emotional state while also remaining balanced and completely open to it.

As you might see now, if you are able to observe the emotional distress caused by a craving or a withdrawal symptom in a balanced way, you are essentially using mindfulness skills to help you navigate that craving. You are using mindfulness as a method to directly increase your tolerance to that craving and reduce its intensity and the power it holds over you.

One extremely important thing I want to leave you with is that mindfulness is a skill that gets stronger and stronger with time and practice. What that means is that initially you might only be capable of mindfulness of very little distress. However, after some practice you will be able to retain your mindfulness in even greater and greater situations of distress. It's like exercise or 'weightlifting' for the mind. And as your distress tolerance increases so will your general happiness because the things that used to overwhelm and scare you before will not have the same power over you, including your cravings and withdrawal!

## My Personal Opinion on Smoking with COVID 19

By Terrance H

The recent pandemic ushered in a frightening period. I will share some of my personal experiences of how smoking frustrated and endangered my peers and I in the mental health system.



Receiving my medical and psychiatric care from the Veterans Administration, I observed the intense addiction smoking can bring upon the mentally ill. I can relate to these issues because I was a pack-a-day user up to about 12 years ago. To my good fortune, I abstained from smoking during the pandemic. A portion of my peers are chronic smokers, and also got COVID. I believe these individuals suffered to the extent that they did because the processing of their medications within the body was impeded by the toxic substances they ingested from tobacco products.

I can recall the restrictions placed upon my peers and me. I will draw attention to the quarantines which increased isolation, further producing anxiety. Some peers dealt with the situation in the most familiar method they knew how: increased smoking.

During the pandemic, health officials placed emphasis on practicing a proper diet and exercising where possible. The reasoning behind this method was simply that the healthier you were the better your immune system was of fighting off COVID.

Despite all the fatalities Covid brought us, it's good to be alive. The virus is still with us but think how much we learned to prevent it. If something like this happens again wisdom is on our side.



## Protect your Health continued from page 1

Following decades of lung cancer and other cancer instances, the public has evolved from powerful warriors portrayed as smokers to individuals who do not tolerate a smoking culture. The general population now understands that cigarettes are both bad and dangerous. However, even as society evolves, there is still an unfair attitude that is widely accepted, and addiction is seen as a moral issue and a moral failure [1]. As a result, stigma may lead to despair, and words matter. It's time to stop referring to smokers as smokers and instead refer to those who have a tobacco use disorder. Medicine can help! However, 66% of the general population thinks that NRTs are just as deadly as tobacco, and this has to change. Tobacco use affects the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of life. If NRTs do not work the first time, they may work the second time, and tobacco treatment specialists advise people to try them again. We support this since it is both safe and effective in lowering drug withdrawal symptoms as well as anger, impatience, and anxiety. Finally, there is a myth that patients, drug and alcohol treatment facilities, and mental health institutions do not want to stop smoking; that tobacco use disorder is a separate issue from drug and alcohol treatment; and that mental health is the priority. However, incorporating smoking cessation into treatment increases the probability of success [1].

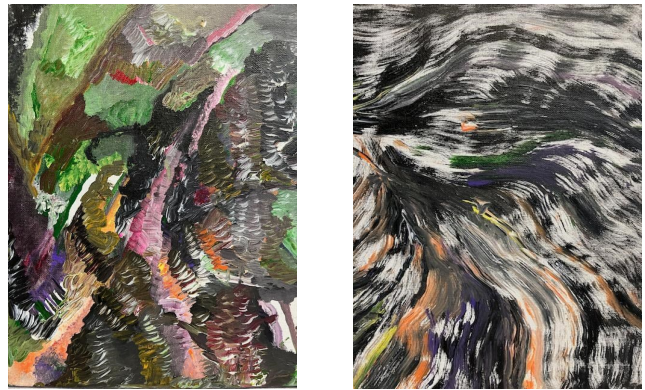
If you are an addicted smoker, consider what tobacco does for you and how it harms you. Make a note of the advantages and disadvantages, and if you discover what it can do for you, what else can fill the void? What may fill that void? Focus on the positive aspects of tobacco rehabilitation in your communities and family. Saying I want to succeed rather than I will fail is equally effective. Even with side effects and everything else, it's worth a chance to protect your health.

[1] William Santoro. (2023, October). 3rd Annual PA Tobacco-Free Recovery is Recovery Statewide Conference [Conference session]. PA STFRI, PA.

## Celebrities continued from page 2

caption “You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby.” My mother (who smoked) was pointing out the ad---I was standing up at the time and I turned around to look at the commercial because I was impressionable at that age and I thought---That means me when I grow up...The caption reads “We made Virginia Slims, especially for women, because women are dainty, and beautiful, and sweet, and generally different from men. You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby.”

## Art Work



Prints by Peter Gualtieri, artist and supporter of CHOICES.

## We Want To Hear From You!

Share your experiences with smoking or how you quit, and receive a large zippered tote bag with the CHOICES logo.



Send your submissions to CHOICES or call for more information:

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732.235.3361  
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# L.O.L! L.O.L! L.O.L!

by Terrance H

See answers below

- |                                 |  |   |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| 1. How do you make an egg roll? | 2. What did the big tomato say to the little tomato who is falling behind? | 3. Why don't they allow elephants on the beach? |
|---------------------------------|--|---|

## Menthol Cigarettes continued from page 1

That is an excellent question, and the answer is surprisingly simple. Menthol masks the harshness of smoking by anesthetizing the throat. It's cool, minty taste appeals to new smokers, especially youth smokers. Multiple studies conclude that menthol cigarettes are highly addictive. These factors alone drive many menthol cigarette opponents towards a menthol ban to protect youth from the health consequences of a lifetime of smoking. Menthol cigarettes make it easier to start smoking and harder to quit. Unfortunately, there is more negative information about menthol cigarettes.

A 2020 study showed that while 43% of all adult smokers smoked menthols, more than 83% of Black smokers did. Only about 30% of White smokers chose menthols. This is not happenstance; cigarette manufacturers have targeted the Black community for decades. Menthol cigarettes worsen existing health inequalities for Blacks. The same study found that Black people die at significantly higher rates than White people of smoking-related illnesses including stroke, heart disease and lung cancer. Black men have the highest rates of lung cancer in the U.S. Blacks make up 12% of the population in the US, but people who are Black account for 41% of smoking-related premature deaths associated with menthol tobacco product use between 1980 and 2018.

The Centers for Disease Control state that menthol use has increased even though overall smoking rates are down. Also, the increase in menthol use is up in young adults, women, ethnic population groups, and adults with mental health problems. Just two weeks ago, CNN reported that eighty national public health groups placed a full-page ad in the Sunday, November 5 edition of the Washington Post. For those who ignore the seriousness of menthol, the ad is compelling. It read "Saving lives starts by ending the sale of menthol cigarettes..."

Consequences of a match made in hell: the harm caused by menthol smoking to the African American population over 1980–2018 David Mendez, Thuy T T Le

**Update: On December 6, 2023 the Biden Administration delayed this ban until March 2024. Stay tuned...**

## Nicotine Withdrawal continued from page 2

try calling one of the NJ Quitcenters, which you can find by calling this number: 1-800-QUIT NOW. If you have other questions, please feel free to reach out to us on our website: [www.njchoices.org](http://www.njchoices.org), and remember, today you have CHOICES!

L.O.L! Answers  
 All jokes are either original by author or found in A Prairie Home Companion Pretty Good Joke Book 6th Edition

1. You push it.
2. Ketchup.
3. Because their trunks keep falling down.



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Diane Beck

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**The CHOICES team will come to you!** The **CHOICES** team of peer advocates will visit your group or program in New Jersey and provide mental health consumers with education about the consequences of smoking and tobacco products along with information regarding treatment resources available to make quitting easier. Email us [dooleypc@rutgers.edu](mailto:dooleypc@rutgers.edu) to set up date.



*CHOICES is a partnership between Rutgers-RWJMS Division of Addiction Psychiatry, the Mental Health Association of New Jersey (MHANJ) and the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services and funded by the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services .*