

GET FIT & GET HEALTHY

Tips to quit

A big problem for many smokers trying to quit is handling the craving for nicotine. Nicotine increases the levels of chemicals in the brain that regulate mood, attention and memory, making it far more difficult to avoid a craving than many people might think. Try these tips when trying to quit.

- **Replace cigarettes.** Many people chew gum in lieu of smoking cigarettes.



- **Learn to relax.** Because nicotine affects chemicals in the brain and, in turn, mood, quitting can make a person cranky and restless. Take 10 slow, deep breaths and hold the last one. Then breathe out slowly and relax all muscles. Imagine a soothing scene and allow your mind to escape as you concentrate on that scene.

- **Leave the room.** Merely changing surroundings when a craving hits works for some people. Head outdoors for some fresh air, walk down the hall to a different room or change what you're doing when cravings hit.

- **Don't fall into the trap of "Just one won't hurt."** "Just one" often turns into more than that, as anyone who has tried and failed at quitting before can attest.

To learn more about quitting smoking, visit www.halton.ca/health

Overweight? You could blame intestinal bacteria

Have you made a resolution to drop a few pounds only to find that no matter what diet you follow, you don't see much of a change when you get on the scale? You may be able to blame intestinal bacteria, say researchers.

There are trillions of bacteria living on the skin, in the nose, mouth, stomach, and intestines of the human body. Most of these bacteria are microscopic helpers, doing the cleaning and breakdown tasks necessary for healthy living. They digest food particles that people simply cannot digest on their own.

In recent years, emphasis into the study of intestinal bacteria has increased. Up until now, the depths of the digestive tract have gone largely unexplored. Scientists are now discovering connections between bacteria and the way food is used and produced for the body. An offshoot of this research is probiotics.

Probiotics are dietary supplements containing potentially beneficial bacteria to help with digestion. Probiotic supplementation is popping up in yogurt and other food sources. These helpful bacteria are purported to fend off stomach discomfort and diarrhea.

Too much of a good thing ...

In regard to obesity, researchers have discovered that some of the bacteria residing in the gastrointestinal system are just too good at their jobs; call them the overachievers of the intestines.



Research has indicated that bacteria in the guts of obese mice are better at extracting energy from food than the gut bacteria in lean mice. Basically, the obese mice take away more energy (calories) from their food than the lean mice. What's more, when the lean mice were injected with the bacteria from fat mice, they gained weight, too.

When human subjects were introduced, most of the same conclusions were found. Bacteria called Firmicutes seem to be the bacteria respon-

sible for high energy consumption, while Bacteroidetes are the bacteria that use the energy and burn off excess calories. More Firmicutes were found in obese individuals. The theory is the Firmicutes are like a fuel-efficient car, taking more energy from the fuel (food) and passing it on to the vehicle (body). While the Bacteroidetes are gas guzzlers, quickly depleting the fuel stores.

More Firmicutes are present in obese mice and humans. And in studies, regardless of what the obese test subjects ate — whether low-fat food or high-caloric junk — Firmicutes simply extracted a higher level of calories. This means depending upon the bacteria present in the gut, a person may extract different amounts of calories from foods. So if a person with more Firmicutes and one with less ate the same food containing 100 calories in a serving, the Firmicutes-rich gut may absorb more calories than the Bacteroidetes-rich gut. A difference of even 10 to 20 calories a day could add up to significant weight differences.

Not a free for all

This research doesn't indicate that a person should go to extremes with consuming high-fat foods and blame weight gain simply on microbiotics. These bacteria are just one factor into the reasons why some people seem to process food differently than others. A balanced diet and exercise are still the best means to keeping a healthy weight. —MS

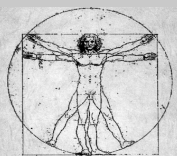
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