How quitting smoking improves your life, short-term and long

By now every smoker knows the habit is unhealthy but there's more to quitting than frightening statistics. There are many benefits to smoke-free living, and you don't have to wait a year to experience — they begin immediately. Here's a time-line of how your life improves:

- In your first 20 minutes after quitting, your heart rate goes down.

- After 12 hours, the carbon monoxide levels in your blood return to normal.

- After two weeks to three months, your lung function starts improving and your risk for heart attack is less. Your clothes, your body, your car and your home will smell better.

- After one to nine months, coughing and shortness of breath diminish. You regain the ability to cough productively instead of hacking, which helps to clear your lungs and reduces your risk of infection. The stains on your teeth fade and disappear.

- After ten years of smoke-free living, your risk of lung cancer is about half that of a person who has continued to smoke. The risk of other cancers, such as cancer of the larynx and pancreas decreases too.

- After fifteen years of not smoking your risk of coronary heart disease is the same as for someone who hasn't smoked

Another benefit of giving up cigarettes is money. With the taxes almost all states tack onto tobacco, cigarettes are expensive. Figuring the cost is another way to cement your resolve to live smoke-free. At the low end, smoking cigarettes costs you thousands of dollars a year!

As you change your habits you'll also change your perception of yourself. You'll begin to see yourself as the healthier person you are becoming, as someone whose long-term health is important.

Living smoke-free relieves you of excusing yourself from your non-smoking friends to take a smoke break. You no longer suffer "the look" from others when you step outside to smoke.

Your family's health improves because their breathing environment improves. When you clean up the air by cutting out the cigarette smoke, you are showing that you care enough to take action.

Noticing the improvements in your body, your bank account, your atmosphere and your self-esteem is hugely reinforcing.

If you are still smoking, start quitting right now. In twenty minutes, you'll feel better. **HI**