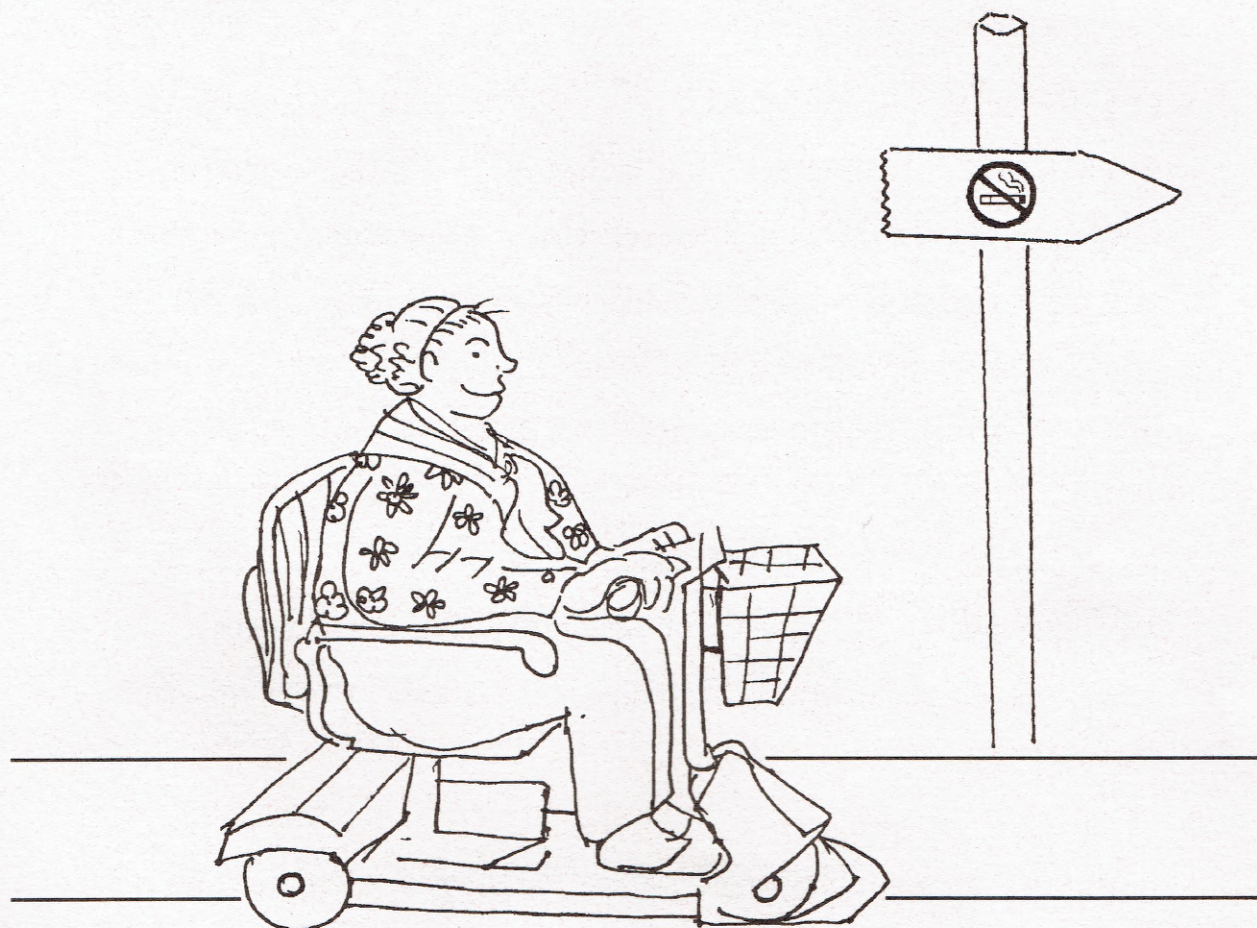


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# BULLETIN

## Women with Disabilities and Smoking

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If you would like a copy of DAWN Canada's workbook "A Way Out: Women with Disabilities and Smoking", mail the self-addressed return postcard before March 15, 1997. After March 15, 1997, call or fax DAWN Canada at (604) 873-1564 to order your copy.

## **TOBACCO!! WHAT'S YOUR POINT?**

Most women have concerns about their health. For women with disabilities, having the best possible health is very important. Smoking is one of the most serious health concern facing women today and DAWN Canada: DisAbled Women's Network Canada has concerns about smoking.

In 1995, DAWN Canada took part in the National Workshop on Women and Tobacco. After that workshop, we started a project funded by Health Canada. It looked at the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs by women with disabilities. In March 1996, the booklet based on our research, "Relief ... At What Cost? -- Summary of Themes," was sent to members of DAWN Canada's network.

Last year the DAWN Canada researcher traveled across Canada, talking to groups of women with disabilities. We asked women questions about tobacco use (and alcohol and other drugs) in their communities.

In this first ever study of smoking and disabled women, we found there are few programs or resources available for women with disabilities who are smokers. Most programs take place in buildings that are very hard (or impossible) to get into. These programs often don't allow for our disabilities.



Written information is often hard to understand and very little is available in alternative formats (E.g. plain language or tape) that we can use. This current project "A Way out: Women with Disabilities and Smoking" is a direct result of last year's research.

We joined DAWN Canada's research and expertise with ideas from programs that were specifically developed to meet the needs of women smokers and the end result was our workbook. Our goal for this project was to create an easy to use (accessible) workbook that women with disabilities could use to help cut back or stop smoking.

This resource will be offered in a coil-bound, large print, easy to read format. It will also be available on audiotape and computer disc (WP 5.1 & MS Word/text.) A limited number of Braille copies are available through the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. It will also be available through the Internet. You can find out where it will be on the Internet through this e-mail address:  
[kareers@nfld.com](mailto:kareers@nfld.com)

We hope that this booklet will help you understand why you smoke. We also hope it will give you facts to help you make choices. We know it is very hard to change but, if and when you're ready, this booklet can help you change your smoking habits.

## **WHY DO MANY WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES USE TOBACCO AND WHAT STOPS US FROM QUITTING OR CUTTING BACK?\***

Women with disabilities told us that tobacco is the most common drug used in our communities. So why do we smoke? Women with disabilities use tobacco for all the same reasons that non-disabled women do.

Cigarette ads by tobacco companies use whatever means they can to actively encourage us to smoke.

Women generally have busy lives, taking care of their families, homes and job, and often smoke to cope with the stress of their lives.

Many women are afraid they will gain weight when they quit smoking and smoke to avoid gaining any weight. Women with disabilities are no different. However, not everyone gains weight and if they do, it is often only a few pounds. Weight gain does less harm to your health than smoking. Also, there are things you can do to limit possible weight gain, such as eating healthy foods and finding some way to exercise. Try to get help if you need it. You will find tips in our workbook.

\*Sources: *Relief...At What Cost?* – Summary of Themes, DAWN Canada; *Focus On: Women and Tobacco*, National Clearinghouse of Tobacco and Health; *When a Woman Smokes*, Canadian Cancer Society; *Women and Smoking*, AWARIE; *Quitting...That's my choice!*, Heart Health Nova Scotia.

Society teaches women it is not okay to get angry. Instead women are taught to think of other people first and be nice all the time. Sometimes smoking helps women control their anger.

During our research, many of the women said they smoke because of anger. Women with disabilities are angry that it is so hard to do even basic things that we need and want to do. We are angry with having disabilities, being unable to work and being poor. Showing anger may cause us to lose our sources of help and smoking can help us control our anger.

Most women say smoking numbs feelings and helps them deal with stress. Women with disabilities in our research agreed. We who have disabilities often live lonely, isolated lives. These are even more reasons to smoke.

These women said that being put down (discriminated against) and abused are also reasons why they use tobacco. This lowers our self esteem and many of the women said low self esteem and stress are the biggest reasons why women with disabilities smoke. High levels of stress and low self esteem make it very hard to quit or cut back.

Many women with disabilities have to depend on caregivers for the basics of life. Many reported they are treated like children, not like women. Smoking can sometimes help us feel like adults.

Women with disabilities want and need to be accepted just like anybody else. We want and deserve respect as adult women. We want to be able to aid in our own care. When we aren't accepted, don't get the respect we deserve and aren't able to aid in our care, it can increase our feelings of anger and stress. These can then be other reasons to smoke. Smoking may also help us be accepted in some groups.

Many of the women said using tobacco gives them time to calm down and think. It can help us relax and relaxing helps us face our pain.

During the research, women said that addiction to smoking was another big reason why many of their friends smoke. The nicotine in tobacco is a very powerful and habit-forming drug. Yet in the short term, it makes us feel good. This makes smoking very hard to stop.

Many of the women thought the reason we don't stop is because smoking is too hard to quit, or because we believe smoking isn't a problem for us.

They also said that lack of help that they can use and understand makes it very hard to stop.

**In "A Way Out," you will find tips that  
may help you deal with these issues.**

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO GET STARTED?**

### **PLAN FOR SUCCESS**

Women with disabilities told us the most important things to help us quit are to find self worth and to value ourselves enough to stop. They also said it is important to deal with day to day stress and feelings of anger. Many of the women reported that it is useful to have the help of a peer (support buddy) who has dealt with quitting or cutting back on her tobacco use.

The use of tobacco affects certain medicines and types of disabilities (E.g. diabetes.). It is very important to talk to all your health care providers before you cut back or stop smoking. Although not for everyone, if you are strongly addicted, you may want to consider using the nicotine patch or nicotine gum. Your doctor can help you with this.

You can start by talking to your family and friends about smoking. Ask them, "Have you ever tried to quit? What helped you?" You may want to tell them you might be thinking of quitting or cutting back on your tobacco use and ask them to support you.

Think what tobacco does for you and what you might get out of quitting. Try to take a moment to think why you lit that last smoke. Could you wait for the next one? If you have tried to quit before, sit down and try to figure out what it was that made you start again. How could you handle the situation differently next time?

You may find help at your local women's or disability centre. Your local health clinic may be able to help. Talking to an elder or Medicine person may be helpful. It may be helpful to join a support group or healing circle.

“A Way Out: Women with Disabilities and Smoking” is written for women with disabilities. It has tips and helpful information that most of us can easily use. If you are a smoker, reading it may be one of the best things you could do for your health.

#### TO ORDER YOUR COPY

**Women with disabilities may order one free copy.** To order, send the self addressed stamped postcard to DAWN Canada.

For professionals, there will be a fee of \$15 per book, plus a \$2.50/book, shipping and handling charge. Women with disabilities who want more than one copy will also have to pay this fee. Unfortunately this charge is necessary in order to recover some of the costs of producing this book. To order, please send cheque or money order with the postcard to DAWN Canada **before March 15, 1997**. After March 16, 1997 call or fax DAWN Canada at (604) 873-1564 to order your copy.