

# ASK AHSC

## ANSWERS TO HEALTH QUESTIONS

from The University of Arizona Health Sciences Center (AHSC) in Tucson

*(EDITORS NOTE: November is National Epilepsy Month)*

**Q** Recently, a former Olympic runner died of epilepsy in her sleep. What is epilepsy and how can you tell if someone has it? *A.S., Tucson*

**A** Epilepsy is a neurological disorder that interrupts the electrical activity of the brain, resulting in transient physical changes called "seizures." Seizures are either generalized (causing loss of consciousness) or partial (consciousness is retained).

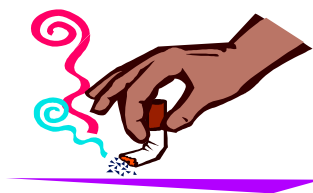
The more subtle signs of epilepsy can be easy for people to miss. Symptoms can include: short periods of blackout or confused memory; occasional "fainting spells" with loss of bladder or bowel control, followed by extreme fatigue; episodes of blank staring; and brief periods of no response to questions or instructions.

In a child symptoms can include sudden falls for no apparent reason; episodes of blinking or chewing at inappropriate times; or a convulsion, either with or without a fever.

These symptoms don't necessarily indicate epilepsy. They can be caused by some other, unrelated condition. But if one or more of these symptoms is experienced, a medical check up is recommended. Only a physician

can accurately diagnose a person with epilepsy.

—*Deanna Bland, R.N., coordinator, Arizona Comprehensive Epilepsy Program at the Arizona Health Sciences Center*



*(EDITORS NOTE: November 19 is the Great American Smokeout)*

**Q** All of my attempts to quit smoking have failed, including using the nicotine patch and nicotine gum. Is there anything new I can try? *C.S., Tucson*

**A** Several new aids to smoking cessation are being evaluated by the Arizona Program for Nicotine and Tobacco Research.

While nicotine patches and nicotine gum help adult smokers kick the habit, these treatments have been shown to be ineffective for most kids. Researchers hope a new stop-smoking medication, Zyban, may provide some relief for younger tobacco smokers.

The generic name for Zyban is Bupropin, which also is the active ingredient in the drug Wellbutrin, used to treat depression. Bupropin was discovered as a smoking-

cessation treatment when researchers found that many individuals taking the drug for depression spontaneously quit smoking. In a study comparing Zyban with the nicotine patch in adult smokers, Zyban doubled the quit rates of the patch.

A plastic nicotine inhaler that the smoker puffs to receive nicotine also is being studied by the Arizona Program for Nicotine and Tobacco Research. Unlike cigarettes--which also contain tar, carbon monoxide and other chemicals--the inhaler provides nicotine only.

Puffing on the nicotine inhaler especially helps smokers who feel the need to do something with their hands while trying to "kick the habit."

Volunteers are needed for a study to evaluate two current medications to help adult chronic cigarette smokers. Participants will attend 13 weekly visits at the program's research clinic over a period of one year and will be on medication for 12 to 13 weeks. The medication and individual counseling sessions are provided at no charge.

Healthy smokers who are interested in participating in this study can call the Arizona Program for Nicotine and Tobacco Research at (520) 621-9907 (voice mail).

Tobacco users also can call the Arizona Smokers Helpline (ASH) at (800) 556-6222 for free counseling to quit smoking. This service is funded by the Arizona Tobacco Tax.

While medication makes the process of quitting smoking easier, there are no miracle cures. High motivation is the key. Highly motivated people still remain the most successful quitters.

—*Scott Leischow, Ph.D., director, Arizona Program for Nicotine and Tobacco Research, The University of Arizona College of Medicine, Tucson*

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