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Make this the year to follow through with screenings

ON CANCER • WILLIAM W. BOWSER • JANUARY 5, 2010

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You may have made promises before. You've said to yourself, "This is the year I'm going to quit smoking." Or, "I'm finally going to lose weight and keep it off." Or even, "I'm going to put those yearly cancer screenings on my calendar and make appointments for them right now."

Eliminating poor health habits, and getting on board with good ones, is everyone's goal. But actually doing it requires behavior change. And for most people, that's one of the most difficult things to accomplish.

One of the important things to realize is that sometimes you have to experience a few failures before your commitment "sticks." For example, according to the American Cancer Society, it takes most people eight to 10 attempts to quit smoking before they're successful. What's important is not giving up and realizing that moving from wanting to quit smoking to actually doing it takes some practice.

Understanding how these bad health habits affect your life may give you the push you need to get started. Along with increasing your risk of lung cancer and heart disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, smoking causes adult male smokers to lose an average of 13.2 years of life and female smokers to lose 14.5 years of life. People who stop smoking before age 50 cut their risk of dying in the next 15 years in half compared with those who keep smoking.

Delaware provides two free services to help people quit smoking. The Delaware Quitline (866-409-1858) is a service available to Delaware residents. Smokers can choose to work on the phone or in person with a trained counselor. Free cessation aids are available through the Quitline to individuals who qualify.

The Delaware QuitNet (www.de.quitnet.com) offers help to quit smoking to those who would rather work online. It's been proved that working with a service such as the Quitline gives you an advantage. People are seven times more likely to quit with help.

Health screenings should also be high on your 2010 to-do list. Schedule them on or near your birthday as a present you give yourself to keep your health on track.

If you're a man 50 or older or a black man 40 or older, you should talk with your doctor about prostate cancer screening.

Although there has been some controversy lately about breast cancer screenings, the Delaware Cancer Consortium continues to recommend that women 40 and older should schedule an annual mammogram. And every woman 18 and older should schedule a cervical cancer screening.

Everyone 50 or older should schedule a colonoscopy every 10 years or sooner based on discussion with their doctor.

Cancer Screening Nurse Navigators are available statewide to help all Delaware residents get tested. To talk

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to a nurse in your area about cancer screenings, call the Delaware Helpline (800) 464-HELP.

Make 2010 the year you take charge of your health.

William W. Bowser is chairman of the Delaware Cancer Consortium, a group of volunteers from all walks of life who contribute their insights, ideas and time to help reduce the burden of cancer in Delaware.



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