



His heart convinced
him it was time to

quit

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Mel Harmon, a representative for the Safety Section of the North Carolina Industrial Commission, had been a smoker for 41 years until his heart convinced him it was time to quit.

“I have not had one cigarette since Monday, February 11, 2002,” said Harmon. This date is easily remembered by Harmon because it was just days before multiple heart attacks forced him to undergo multivessel bypass surgery.

Before he had a heart attack, Harmon had experienced frequent chest pain but had ignored it. “I had convinced myself it was respiratory





problems because I was a smoker,” said Harmon.

One day, however, the pains became too strong to ignore. “It was so severe there was no doubt of what it was,” recalled Harmon. “It was going up into my lungs and into my throat. I knew it was a heart attack and that I might die.”

The symptoms that Harmon experienced are among those recognized by the American Heart Association – chest discomfort, discomfort in other upper areas of the body (like the back, neck, jaw or stomach) and shortness of breath – as the top signs of a heart attack.

As a Safety Representative, Harmon knew the importance of obtaining emergency care in the event of a heart attack. However, as Harmon and his wife passed a fire station on the way to the hospital, Harmon ignored his training. “I said don’t slow down, keep going,” Harmon recalled. “My wife and I have been married for 39 years. She never listened to me before. I don’t know why she listened to me this time!”

Despite this self-proclaimed lapse in judgment, Harmon was admitted to UNC hospitals and underwent six successful bypasses. During Harmon’s week-long recovery,

he did not smoke a single cigarette and has not smoked since.

“I firmly believe that – at least to me – addiction dies in seven days,” said Harmon. After he quit, Harmon said that cigarette smoke would smell good at times but that the urge to smoke “would pass in seconds, not minutes, but *seconds*.”

According to the National Cancer Institute, smokers are likely to find it difficult to stop smoking and may relapse during the first few weeks after quitting. Smokers who can stop for three months are most often able to remain cigarette free for the rest of their lives.

As Harmon thinks back over his 41 years as a smoker, he honestly does not remember a day he went without smoking, even when he was sick. Friends who see Harmon now, five years after he quit smoking, still tell him, “Of all the people I’ve ever known, I never thought you would quit smoking.”

“If you’re one of those who thinks you can’t quit, you can, but you have to do it before something bad happens,” said Harmon.

Now, as a non-smoker, Harmon sees the impact that smoking had on other people, like family members, who interact with a smoker. “To

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believe that your addiction is affecting other people is just more than we want to deal with," Harmon admitted. "I'm sure my wife's life is more pleasant without it, without the smell and frustration of living with a smoker."

If you quit smoking, Harmon says, "You're going to enjoy life a lot more."

A co-worker of Harmon's once told him that his life would be much less complication if he stopped smoking. This advice that, according to Harmon, came from someone who maybe smoked a couple of cigarettes when he was 18, became clear to Harmon after he quit smoking.

"My life is less complicated," he said. "I don't have to worry about running out of cigarettes in the middle of the night, or finding time to take a break to smoke, or finding a place to smoke, which is hard these days. I don't have to worry about whether I stink of smoke either," he jokes.

In addition to the positive impact that quitting smoking has made on his loved ones and the simplicity that has been added to his life, Harmon also feels much better about himself since he quit. "If you think that something has conquered you and you conquer it, that boosts your self-esteem," said Harmon.

Harmon plans to remain cigarette-free. ■

Instant Results & Long Lasting Improvements!

No, it's not the latest fad diet or gimmick. The moment you quit smoking you DO begin to feel dramatic differences in your body and overall wellbeing right away! Why wait any longer?

20 Minutes After Quitting

Your heart rate drops.

12 hours After Quitting

Carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.

2 Weeks to 3 Months After Quitting

Your heart attack risk begins to drop. Your lung function begins to improve.

1 to 9 Months After Quitting

Your coughing and shortness of breath decrease.

1 Year After Quitting

Your added risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker's.

5 Years After Quitting

Your stroke risk is reduced to that of a nonsmoker's.

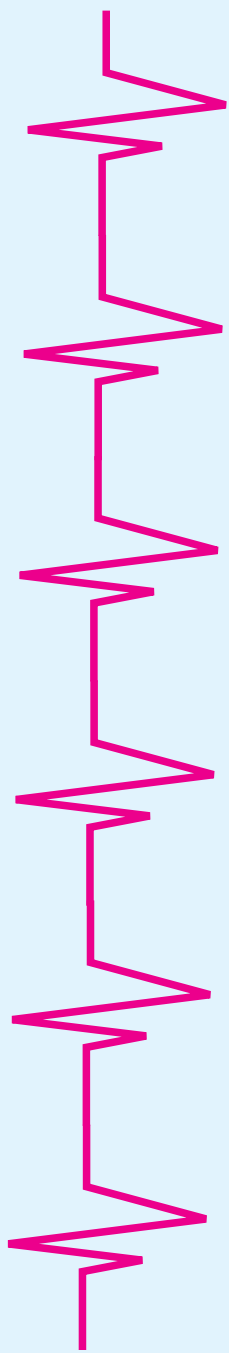
10 Years After Quitting

Your lung cancer death rate is about half that of a smoker's.

Your risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas decreases.

15 Years After Quitting

Your risk of coronary heart disease is back to that of a nonsmoker's.



Information taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2004/posters/20mins.htm.

For more information, visit www.shpnc.org.