



***NOTE TO MEDIA:** Nearly a dozen "Success Stories" and downloadable photos for different regions of New York State are available at the Quitline's Online News Room: <https://nysmokefree.com/newsroom>. Inspirational New Yorkers became nicotine-free in 2020 for a variety of reasons: COVID-19 concerns, the birth of a child, improved health, battling cancer and much more. Please reach out to the Quitline any time, any day, for supplemental interviews to enhance your coverage of New Year's resolutions and stories of hope heading into 2021.*

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **ALBANY-AREA WOMAN PROVIDES INSPIRATION TO BECOME TOBACCO-FREE IN 2021**

*Despite the challenges of 2020, Jackie O. overcame a 38-year addiction to smoking with support from the New York State Smokers' Quitline*

**ALBANY, N.Y. – Dec. 31, 2020** – Life was completely different one year ago for Jackie O. of Halfmoon, N.Y. The single mother of two high-functioning autistic adult children was unhappy, overweight and losing control of her health. But today, despite the added challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jackie is in the midst of new, healthier chapters of her life. The underlying factor for her transformation was becoming tobacco-free, thanks to support from the New York State Smokers' Quitline (Quitline).



Jackie (*pictured at left*), 53, first began smoking about 38 years ago as a teenager. She tried becoming tobacco-free on numerous occasions but would always relapse after two weeks or less. "I smoked two packs a day and the addiction was too strong," Jackie said. "I'm on a very limited budget, and yet I felt like I was working to smoke. How ridiculous it all seems now."

During the summer of the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of concurrent events led Jackie to seek help from the Quitline. She initially decided she would begin to embrace an active lifestyle and sought to undergo gastric bypass surgery. Her children implored her to first quit smoking in order to be ready for such a major procedure. Right around that same time, Jackie received a troubling call from her cardiologist.

"My cardiologist expressed worry that I might have a major heart condition," she said. "I went through a series of tests and they fortunately came back clean, but that initial call was so scary. I already have asthma and might be in the early stages of COPD. All these factors made me think hard about my life and especially my children. My boys really need me, and I was worried I wouldn't be around if I kept smoking."

Jackie's primary care provider, Dr. Katherine Herdzik of Troy Medical Group, referred her to the Quitline in July. Upon consulting the Quitline and developing a personalized quit-plan, Jackie then received free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) in the form of nicotine patches and nicotine gum via mail.

"The supplies were wonderful, and the nicotine gum particularly helped me get through the first two weeks," she said. "It was comforting knowing the Quit Coaches were just a call away in case I felt a moment of weakness."

Jackie fully committed to the process and told herself on the first day, "I'm a non-smoker." It's a phrase she continues to repeat as she prepares for gastric bypass surgery on the final day of 2020. During her five months of her newfound tobacco-free lifestyle, Jackie swims an average of one hour each day and walks regularly.

"I'm never going back to smoking," Jackie proudly proclaimed. "Five months has already felt like five years. I'm breathing so much better and doing things I never thought I could do. The money savings has been incredible, too – I had hundreds of dollars more to spend on holiday presents this year."

Jackie advises all tobacco users to try quitting even just for a few weeks to notice the difference it makes. But she also realizes they have to first feel ready to quit.

"You really have to be mentally ready," she said. "But get help through the Quitline and try it. You'll be amazed how much money you'll save and how much better you'll feel. Personally, it feels like someone cut a giant chain from me. Becoming tobacco-free is the best thing I've ever done. Everything has changed – and it's so wonderful."

The Quitline encourages all tobacco and vape-product users to make 2021 their best year ever by becoming tobacco-free, especially in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. According to the CDC, those who smoke [suffer more severe effects](#) if infected with the coronavirus.

The Quitline recommends tobacco and vape-product users consult a healthcare professional as part of a tobacco-free journey. Healthcare professionals can provide referrals to the Quitline for free quit-coaching and free NRT such as nicotine patches and nicotine gum or lozenges – and nearly all participants are eligible. The Quitline’s Quit Coaches are available seven days a week beginning at 9 a.m. by calling 1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487) beginning at 9 a.m. or by visiting [www.nysmokefree.com](http://www.nysmokefree.com) and requesting a call.

### **About the New York State Smokers’ Quitline**

The New York State Smokers’ Quitline is a service of the New York State Department of Health and based at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo, N.Y. It is one of the first and busiest state quitlines in the nation and has responded to nearly 3 million calls since it began operating in 2000. The Quitline encourages nicotine users to talk with their healthcare professionals and access available Medicaid or health insurance benefits for stop-smoking medications. All New York State residents can call **1-866-NY-QUITS** (1-866-697-8487) for coaching and resources, free of charge, seven days a week beginning at 9 a.m. Visit [www.nysmokefree.com](http://www.nysmokefree.com) for more information.

### **About Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center**

Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center is a community united by the drive to eliminate cancer’s grip on humanity by unlocking its secrets through personalized approaches and unleashing the healing power of hope. Founded by Dr. Roswell Park in 1898, it is the only National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center in Upstate New York. Learn more at [www.roswellpark.org](http://www.roswellpark.org), or contact us at 1-800-ROSWELL (1-800-767-9355) or [ASKRoswell@roswellpark.org](mailto:ASKRoswell@roswellpark.org).

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