

Break free from a bad habit

If you're a smoker who would like to stop, this Wednesday (March 10) could be the ideal time to try.

It is National No Smoking Day when, each year, nearly one million people manage to kick the habit.

To mark the day, NHS Havering's Stop Smoking team will be out and about in Romford offering free practical support and advice to help people give up cigarettes, and information about the services they provide locally.

A No Smoking Day event, entitled Breakfree, will be held in the Liberty Shopping Centre, Liberty Square, near BHS and River Island, from 10am to 4pm.

DJ Neil Andrews from Time FM will be broadcasting live from the event, dressed up as a giant cigarette.

A competition will offer prizes of a voucher for a facial at Clarins spa, or a month's membership to

the Fitness First gym, with a day's membership for everyone who enters.

The Stop Smoking team will give information about ways to quit the habit, including available medication, and offer smokers a newly developed test, to check lung age, along with carbon monoxide level checks.

Visitors will also be able to have their blood pressure checked. A smoker is four times more likely to succeed in quitting with help from the local stop smoking service.

Havering Fire Service will be on hand to give useful information on fire safety, with free smoke alarms on offer. Trading Standards and Homes in Havering will advise on smoke-free homes and underage sales of tobacco.

- For free advice call Havering Stop Smoking Service on 0800 023 0102.

Jackie and Phil Kendall, from Hornchurch, have had a long and happy marriage, enjoying socialising with family and friends, and holidays in Spain.

Until recently one of their many shared activities was smoking, but with the encouragement of their grandchildren and NHS Havering Stop Smoking Service, they have quit the habit together.

Phil, a retired police officer, said: "We both started smoking as teenagers, and we enjoyed it. Even though my dad died of lung cancer and my mother has had part of her lung removed, it still didn't stop me."

"But then our oldest grandson went to school and started learning about the dangers of smoking, and when he told me that I smelled of smoke, I thought I had better give up." Jackie added: "Once he could read, he would read the health warnings on my cigarette packets, and that made me feel bad."

Jackie's GP suggested she speak to NHS Havering's Stop Smoking team, who were holding consultations in the local surgery.

Phil decided to go too, and



the couple met Stop Smoking Advisor Marilyn D'Alth, who explained possible options to help them quit.

Phil says: "Marilyn is very helpful, and she doesn't preach. There's nothing worse than people preaching at you about smoking and I would never do that to other smokers."

Jackie and Phil opted to try Champix, the stop smoking medication which cancels out the pleasant sensations that smokers get from cigarettes. They put out their final cigarette last November, and say they have not had cravings since.

They took regular tests to check their carbon monoxide

levels, which Phil says were very helpful. "At first, my level was up in the red, but every week we could see it going down. It was a great incentive not to sneak a cigarette in case it put the level up, and it was great to finally get a green reading, classing us as non-smokers."

Phil says he enjoys eating out with friends more now, without having to leave the table between courses for a cigarette, and Jackie recalls an evening standing smoking outside a restaurant, getting soaked in the rain.

She adds: "Our children and grandchildren are really pleased we've stopped, and they say we don't smell any more."

>> Smoking facts

- At today's prices, a 20-a-day smoker will spend more than £37,000 over the next 20 years
- If you continue smoking, there's a 50% chance it will kill you
- More than 17,000 children

under the age of five are admitted to hospital every year because of the effects of passive smoking.

- The skin of a 40-year-old smoker is as damaged as that of a 60-year-old non-smoker.

Bowel cancer screening temporarily suspended

The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme has had to temporarily suspend screening in Havering, but it will resume as soon as possible.

Barking Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals Trust (BHRT) had been commissioned to deliver the programme locally, but had to prove it could meet all the necessary criteria.

One of these is providing regular and timely colonoscopies to patients who do not have symptoms of bowel cancer, but require surveillance for various reasons, such as family medical history. Among this group of patients, BHRT is at present unable to meet the waiting time target for offering them colonoscopies.

As a result, the Screening

Programme has been temporarily suspended.

However, BHRT is meeting waiting time targets for providing colonoscopies to patients who have possible symptoms of bowel cancer. As soon as it has cleared the backlog of surveillance patients, they will resume the Programme.

Chas Hollwey, Chief Executive of NHS Havering said: "Screening our older population for bowel cancer is a high priority. We have asked the Screening Programme and BHRT to do everything possible to restart the screening programme as quickly as possible, and have been assured that it is hoped this will be done in April. In the meantime we encourage anyone who is concerned about symptoms to see their GP immediately."

Swine flu still a threat

It's out of the news, but swine flu is still around, and may cause serious illness in some people.

GP surgeries are offering vaccinations throughout spring and summer to protect vulnerable patients against swine flu.

Those most at risk include: people of all ages with long-term health conditions, pregnant women, people of all ages with weakened immune systems and members of their households.

The swine flu jab is also available until the end of March for healthy children over six months and under five years. Make an appointment with your GP or for details, call Julie Weir Immunisations Co-ordinator at NHS Havering on 465703.

For general information on swine flu, call 0800 1 513 513 or see www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu

Service nailed down



A range of footwear, including nail-cutting, is available at Queen's

A new clinic offering footwear is now available at the Outpatients Department at Queen's Hospital in Romford.

The clinic, which is open on Tuesdays from 8.30am to 12.30pm, is run by a team of professional footwear assistants and is organised by Age Concern Havering.

The footwear assistants have been trained by NHS Havering's

Podiatry Service and the team already offers home visits and clinic sessions at various NHS venues around the borough.

The first appointment costs £20, which includes a personal footwear toolkit and a nail-cutting session. Subsequent appointments are £12. Walk-ins are possible if there are vacant appointments.

For details, call 796608.