

BREAK FREE

with

OSCAR BAMUHIGIRE

My brother has failed to quit smoking; is it mental illness?

Q Dear Counsellor,
My brother has been a smoker for many years, but he has failed to quit or does not want to. Each time he quits, he relapses. Does he have to first hit rock bottom before he quits? Will it be easier if we let him fall sick first? Why is his will power so weak? Is it a sign of mental illness?

Julie, Masindi

A Dear Julie,
It is kind of you to show concern about your brother's health. While your brother may seem disinterested in quitting smoking, the fact is that he is trying hard to quit. The real problem here is that quitting smoking is a difficult task. Every year, about three out of four smokers plan to quit and yet out of these only 5% make a successful attempt. That is according to a 2009 study published in the journal *Health Reports*.

Hitting rock bottom does not really help a smoker to quit. Smokers, who have diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, are not any more likely to think of quitting smoking than healthy smokers.

In a one year period, out of all those suffering from this deadly disease, 1.4% manage to quit. This was revealed by a 2010 study published in the journal *Thorax*. According to this study, one is more likely to quit if they get intensive counselling sessions, because these can increase the quit rate to 6.0%.

The study also observed that medications used for smoking cessation can double the cessation rate to 12.3%. But the researchers said minimal counseling, which lasts less than 90 minutes, only brings about a slight increase in smoking cessation rates to 2.6%.

Smoking cessation rates are three to four times higher when one combines medication with counselling.

The most commonly used drugs for smoking cessation are nicotine and antidepressants. Your brother's chances of quitting will be higher if he can also join a self-help group of people who quit smoking.

... then smoking?