

Sweet Kisses

Tracey Reynolds was in the middle of the Christmas season rush, getting her grandkids off to church choir practice, hosting the village bake sale, and attending neighborhood holiday parties with her husband, Jeff. While she kept herself physically fit with regular yoga and tennis, she was worried because she was still smoking cigarettes. After her 60th birthday in October, she had decided it was time to quit since both her mother and grandmother had been smokers and had had heart attacks in their 60s. She went to her family doctor for help and, at first, he suggested Nicorette gum. When the Nicorette gum didn't relieve her desire to smoke, he suggested a prescription for Chantix (Varenicline), which he told her may be more effective than gum. With all the hectic holiday stress, she told herself, "I'm too busy to pick up that prescription right now. I can put it off until after the holidays." As she would soon find out, that was a poor decision.

BY DR. TIMOTHY SANBORN

One morning, after three days of racing around to get the house ready for her parents to visit, Tracey noticed a pressure in her chest and a shortness of breath while carrying laundry up a flight of stairs. She also felt a dull ache radiating down her left arm. She put the laundry down, sat on the bed and rested for 20 minutes. When her symptoms persisted, she decided it was time to call 911.

Within minutes of her arrival in the emergency room, the nurses immediately performed an electrocardiogram and drew some blood to test whether Tracey was having a heart attack. "Fortunately, your electrocardiogram and your first set of cardiac enzymes don't show any sign of a heart attack," the emergency room doctor explained to Tracey. "However, I'm very concerned about the symptoms you're describing, and an elevation of your heart enzymes may not be detected in the first

few hours of a heart attack," he cautioned. "I want you to stay here in the emergency room so we can recheck your heart enzymes in four hours."

"But doctor, I need to finish getting the house ready for my parents who are coming this weekend. Can't you just give me some pills to take care of the chest pains?" she asked.

"You may get your wish, but that's a little premature. First, we'll need to recheck the heart enzymes and then go from there."



When the second set of cardiac enzymes returned, they indicated that Tracey did have a minor heart attack, and I was soon called to come in for a cardiology consultation. After talking to Tracey and verifying the results, I explained to her, "The elevated heart enzymes indicate that you've had some damage to your heart muscle. We need to take you to the catheterization laboratory to perform an angiogram to look at your coronary arteries and see if there is a blockage that is causing your chest pressure and shortness of breath." Fortunately for Tracey, the angiogram revealed only a single blockage, which we were able to open up with a stent.

"Well, Tracey, you were lucky you only had one blockage, and that it could be opened up with a stent rather than a coronary bypass operation," I said after completing the procedure. "This should relieve your chest pressure and shortness of breath. But, there is something more important we need to talk about; we need to make sure you stop smoking."

"I guess it's time to start taking that

Chantix my doctor recommended," replied Tracey.

"Congratulations, Tracey. You're taking the first step by making the decision to quit. Asking your husband and close friends for moral support can also help you succeed. Nicotine addiction is very tough. It's more addicting than cocaine!" I emphasized. "Avoiding triggers that cause you to pick up a cigarette, like drinking coffee or alcohol with friends who smoke. Try exercise, instead, which releases endorphin hormones that are stress relievers."

"What are my chances of quitting smoking with Chantix?"

"Well, in two randomized clinical trials of patients with heart attacks, the rates for successful smoking cessation were 40-47% with Chantix, which was significantly better than the tests of patients treated with a placebo control pill. My nurses and I will monitor your success in the office and encourage you quit," I reassured her.

When Tracey returned to the office three months later, she had a big smile on her face and was proud to tell me that she hadn't had a cigarette since her heart attack. "Good work, Tracey," I said as she related her success. "You deserve a reward for this. Just think how much money you are saving, too."

"Well, I was fortunate," she said. "The Chantix worked long enough for me to snuff out my nicotine habit. I did have some nausea from it, so I had to stop taking it after eight weeks. But, that was long enough. Today, I'm free of cigarettes and feel great."

"Nausea is one of the side effects of Chantix. I'm glad it helped you quit before you had to stop taking it. You know, it's patients like you who work hard to change their lifestyle and take better care of their health that really make it worthwhile to practice cardiology," I told her as she got up to leave.

"Well, the best part is that my breath is now so fresh. My husband actually complimented me by telling me I had 'sweet kisses' when he kissed me last night." □