

The laser to help you quit smoking for good



Zap those cravings: Laser treatment

ANNIE WESTHORPE puffed half-a-million cigarettes over 46 years before her body told her it was time to stop.

After collapsing with an angina attack on her 67th birthday last October, she was desperate to give up the weed. But despite doctors' warnings, she was unable to quit using conventional methods such as nicotine gum, patches or willpower.

Then Annie, from Coatbridge, near Glasgow, was told of a revolutionary new treatment, being tested at Monklands Hospital in nearby Airdrie, which could potentially save thousands of lives every year.

It involved being zapped with a laser beam on the hands, nose, ears and wrists in a technique which uses the principles of acupuncture but has a much greater success rate.

Developed by researchers in Canada, it uses a harmless 'cold' laser beam. A session lasts 30 minutes and at the end the patient is left with a feeling of well-being or even euphoria. This happens because the laser — when 'fired' at acupuncture points — sends signals through the nervous system to help stimulate production of endorphins, substances produced in the brain which act as natural pain suppressors.

This rush of endorphins gives the

By **PAT HAGAN**

patient a natural high and eases the stress associated with the withdrawal of nicotine.

To her amazement, Annie, who attended six sessions spread over three months, was able to throw away her cigarettes after the first clinic. 'I've never looked back,' she says.

And now doctors say the technique is so successful that 52 pc of people stay off cigarettes compared with just 5 pc with other methods.

Annie says: 'The doctors said smoking was to blame for my heart condition, so I promised I would not buy any more.'

BUT after coming out of hospital I started having the odd puff again. Then I had a routine check-up with a nurse who asked if I had tried laser therapy.

'After the treatment I do get the craving occasionally when I have had something to eat but it does not bother me.'

Laser therapy has already been shown to work in pain relief, weight control and stress relief. But a six-month pilot study at Monklands Hospital, funded by the NHS, has produced extraordinary results in combating smoking.

Out of 60 patients to get the treatment, 31 have given up. The therapy was made available to patients after it was tried out on hospital staff when a ban on smoking was introduced.

One year later, 46 pc of the 125 doctors, nurses and porters who tried it are still not smoking.

Complementary therapist Anne Penman, who has developed and promoted laser therapy for smokers in the UK, was a heavy smoker herself for 20 years.

She was then asked to experiment with the treatment by health chiefs at Monklands in a desperate bid to tackle some of the highest rates of smoking-related diseases in the UK. More than 1,000 people in Lanarkshire die of heart disease, lung cancer and circulatory disease every year.

'Patients have their first session and then I see them a couple of days later to see if they are having any problems,' says Anne.

But she is adamant that laser therapy alone is of limited use without properly structured counselling to go with it. This focuses on the positive aspects of giving up, rather than berating smokers for polluting the environment.

Now the pioneering laser treatment is being made available to other hospitals and commercial organisations.