

## Cigarette Smoking and Its Health Risks

**Smoking and health:** Cigarette smoking is the most preventable cause of illness and death. Many people die every year from illnesses caused by smoking. People who smoke die earlier than those who do not smoke. The risk of disease increases if the person smokes a lot, inhales deeply, or has smoked many years.

### Why are cigarettes bad?

Cigarettes are filled with poison that goes into the lungs when a person inhales. Coughing, dizziness, and burning of the eyes, nose, and throat are early signs that smoking is harming you. Smoking increases health risks if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or high blood cholesterol. The long-term problems of smoking cigarettes are the following:

- Tobacco kills up to half of its users.
- Tobacco kills nearly 6 million people each year. More than five million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while more than 600 000 are the result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke.
- Nearly 80% of the world's one billion smokers live in low- and middle-income countries.

**Smoking is estimated to cause about 71 percent of lung cancer, 42 percent of chronic respiratory disease and nearly 10 percent of cardiovascular disease as per WHO**

- **Cancer:** Cigarette smoking may play a role in developing many kinds of cancer, lung cancer being the most common kind and amongst the others are cancer of lips, mouth, throat, or voice box, esophagus, stomach, kidney, pancreas, cervix, bladder, and skin cancer.
- **Heart and blood vessel disease:** The nicotine in the tobacco causes an increase in heart rate and blood pressure. The arteries (blood vessels) in the arms and legs tighten and narrow because of the nicotine in cigarette smoke. Cigarette smoke increases blood clotting, and may damage the lining of your heart's arteries and other blood vessels.

Cigarette smoke contains Carbon monoxide which is a harmful gas that gets into the blood and decreases oxygen going to the heart and the body. Hardening of the arteries happens more often in smokers than in nonsmokers. This may increase the risk of getting a stroke (blood clot in your brain). The more cigarettes you smoke, the greater your risk of a heart attack.

- **Lung disease:** Many smokers have a cough which is caused by the chemicals in smoke. These chemicals harm the cilia (tiny hairs) that line the lungs and help remove dirt and waste products. Depending upon how much you smoke, your lungs become gray and "dirty" (they look like charcoal). Healthy lungs are pink.



Chronic smoking can lead to many other respiratory diseases such as chronic bronchitis, Emphysema and also makes asthma worse. People are at a higher risk of getting colds, pneumonia, and other lung infections if they smoke.

- **Gastrointestinal disease:** Cigarette smoking increases the amount of acid that is made by the stomach, and may cause a peptic ulcer (an open sore in the stomach or duodenum). You may also get gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) from smoking. This is when you have a backflow of stomach acid into your esophagus (food tube).

- **Other problems:** The following are other problems that smoking may cause:
  - Bad breath
  - Bad smell in your clothes, hair, and skin.
  - Decreased ability to play sports or do physical activities because of breathing problems.
  - Earlier than normal wrinkling of the skin, usually the face.
  - Higher risk of bone fractures, such as hip, wrist, or spine because smoking decreases the bone mineral density
  - Men may have problems having an erection.
  - Sleeping problems.
  - Sore throat.
  - Staining of teeth.

**Women and smoking:** Women may have a higher risk of having the following:

- a heart attack or stroke if they smoke and use birth control pills (more serious for females more than 35 years or older)

- osteoporosis (also known as "brittle bones")
- incontinence
- harder getting pregnant

### **Smoking & Pregnancy Risks:**

- The risk of losing unborn baby or having a stillborn baby is higher if you are pregnant and smoke.
- Babies born to smoking mothers often weigh less, and are at a higher risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

**What is "passive smoking or second hand smoke"?** The effect that smoking has on nonsmokers is called "passive smoking". Nonsmokers who breathe tobacco smoke have the same health risks as smokers. Children who are around tobacco smoke may have more colds, ear infections, or other breathing problems.

### **Why should one quit smoking?**

#### **Physical benefits after quitting**

1. 20 minutes – blood pressure and pulse rate is back to normal.
2. 8 hours – Notice that you can breathe easier? Your oxygen levels are back to normal and your chance of having a heart attack has gone down.
3. 24 hours – Coughing a lot? That's a good sign...your lungs are starting to clear out the mucus.
4. 48 hours – You are nicotine-free. Enjoying food more? Your senses of taste and smell are improving.
5. 72 hours – You'll have more energy. Your lung capacity is increasing and your bronchial tubes are relaxing, so breathing and exercising is easier.
6. 1 year – Your risk of heart attack has dropped by 50%.
7. 10 years – Your risk of dying from lung cancer is cut in half.
8. 10 – 15 years – Your risk of dying from a heart attack is the same as a person who has never smoked.
9. Sense of taste and smell will improve.
10. Your body, clothes, car, and home will not smell of tobacco smoke.

#### **Reference:**

1. Micromedex's Healthcare Series Online 2
2. <http://www.who.int/tobacco/research/osteoporosis/en/>
3. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs339/en/index.html>