



Questions About Smoking, Tobacco, and Health

What in tobacco smoke is harmful?

Cigarettes, cigars, and pipe tobacco are made from dried tobacco leaves, as well as ingredients added for flavor and to make smoking more pleasant. The smoke from these products is a complex mixture of chemicals produced by the burning of tobacco and its additives. The smoke is made up of more than 7,000 chemicals, including over 60 known to cause cancer (carcinogens). Some of these substances cause heart and lung diseases too, and all of them can be deadly. You might be surprised to know some of the chemicals found in tobacco smoke include:

- Cyanide
- Benzene
- Formaldehyde
- Methanol (wood alcohol)
- Acetylene (the fuel used in welding torches)
- Ammonia

Tobacco smoke also contains tar and the poison gases carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide. The ingredient that produces the effect people are looking for is nicotine, an addictive drug and one of the harshest chemicals in tobacco smoke.

The tobacco leaves used in making cigarettes and cigars contain radioactive materials; the amount depends on the soil the plants were grown in and fertilizers used. But this means that the smoke contains small amounts of radioactive material too, which smokers take into their lungs as they inhale. These radioactive particles build up in the lungs, and over time can mean a big dose of radiation. This may be another key factor in smokers getting lung cancer.

Does smoking cause cancer?

Yes. Smoking accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths in the United States and 87% of lung cancer deaths. Smoking also causes cancers of the nasopharynx (upper throat), nasal cavity, paranasal sinuses, lip, larynx (voice box), mouth, pharynx (throat), esophagus (swallowing tube), and bladder. It also has been linked to the development of cancers of the pancreas, cervix, ovary,

colorectum, kidney, stomach, and some types of leukemia. Cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and spit and other types of smokeless tobacco all cause cancer. There is no safe way to use tobacco.

How does tobacco smoke affect the lungs?

Damage to the lungs begins early in smokers, and cigarette smokers have a lower level of lung function than non-smokers of the same age. Lung function continues to worsen as long as the person smokes, but it may take years for the problem to become noticeable enough for lung disease to be diagnosed. Smoking causes many lung diseases like, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), chronic bronchitis and emphysema, that can be nearly as bad as lung cancer

Does smoking tobacco affect your heart?

Yes. Smoking tobacco increases the risk of heart disease, which is the number one cause of death in the United States. Smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, physical inactivity, obesity, and diabetes are all risk factors for heart disease. But the biggest risk factor for sudden death from a heart attack is cigarette smoking. A smoker who has a heart attack is more likely to die within an hour of the heart attack than a non-smoker. Tobacco smoke can harm the heart at very low levels, even when the amount is too low to cause lung disease.

How does smoking affect pregnant women and their babies?

Pregnant women who smoke risk the health and lives of their unborn babies. Smoking during pregnancy is linked with a greater chance of miscarriage, premature delivery, stillbirth, infant death, low birth-weight, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Up to 5% of infant deaths could be prevented if pregnant women did not smoke. Many women know about some of these hazards, and most try to stop smoking when they find out they're pregnant.

When a pregnant woman smokes, she's smoking for 2. The nicotine, carbon monoxide, and other harmful chemicals enter her bloodstream, go into the baby's body, and keep it from getting vital nutrients and oxygen it needs for growth. Breast-feeding is the best way to feed a new baby, but if the mother smokes the baby is exposed to nicotine and other substances from the smoke through breast milk. Nicotine can cause unwanted symptoms in the baby, such as restlessness, a rapid heartbeat, vomiting, shorter sleep times, and diarrhea. It's better not to smoke while breast feeding. But breast feeding is thought to be healthier for the baby than the bottle, even when the mother smokes. Women who can't quit right away can

- Make their homes smoke-free to keep the child away from second hand smoke
- Smoke just after breast-feeding to give the body more time to clear nicotine from breast milk
- Cut back on their smoking as much as possible

Some research has also suggested that children whose mothers smoked while pregnant or who have been exposed to secondhand smoke, even in small amounts, may be slower learners in school. They may be shorter and smaller than children of non-smokers. They are also more likely to smoke when they get older.

What are some of the short- and long-term effects of smoking tobacco?

Smoking causes many types of cancer. But cancers account for only about half of the deaths linked to smoking. Long-term, smoking is also a major cause of heart disease, aneurysms, bronchitis, emphysema, and stroke. It also makes pneumonia and asthma worse. Smoking is linked to about half of the gum disease in the United States, which means more tooth loss and mouth surgery. Wounds take longer to heal and the immune system may not work as well in people who smoke. Smoking also damages the arteries. This is why many vascular surgeons refuse to operate on patients with peripheral artery disease (poor blood circulation in the arms and legs) unless they stop smoking. And male smokers have a higher risk of sexual impotence (erectile dysfunction) the longer they smoke. Smoking also causes many short-term effects, such as poor lung function. This is why smokers often suffer shortness of breath and nagging coughs. They often tire quickly during physical activity. Some other common short-term effects include less ability to smell and

Is secondhand (environmental) tobacco smoke dangerous?

There is no safe level of exposure for secondhand smoke (SHS), which is also called environmental tobacco smoke. Passive smoking (inhaling secondhand smoke) happens when non-smokers breathe other people's tobacco smoke. This includes *mainstream smoke* (smoke that's exhaled into the air by smokers) and *side stream smoke* (smoke that comes directly from the burning tobacco). SHS contains the same harmful chemicals the smokers inhale. It's known to cause lung cancer in non-smokers, and has been linked to other cancers and health problems in non-smokers, too. Children and babies are at special risk: those who breathe secondhand smoke are more likely to get sick and even die than children who aren't around SHS.

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