SMOKING

An introduction to aging science brought to you by the American Federation for Aging Research
WHY SMOKING IS SUCH A PROBLEM FOR OLDER ADULTS?

Before cigarette smoking became popular in the early part of the 20th century, doctors rarely, if ever, saw patients with lung cancer. Today, however, lung cancer is the leading cause of death by cancer. Almost 90 percent of people with this disease developed it because they smoked cigarettes. Even cigar and pipe smokers who do not inhale are at increased risk for lung, mouth, and other types of cancer. The American Lung Association details the following facts about smoking that are specific to an older population.

Smoking among older adults fact sheet

Older adults began smoking before its harmful effects were well understood. This generation of Americans is now experiencing the health consequences of an average of 40 years of smoking. An estimated 443,000 Americans die each year from diseases caused by smoking. Smoking is responsible for an estimated one in five U.S. deaths and costs the United States more than $150 billion each year in health care costs and lost productivity. In 2008, over 17 million American over age 45 smoked, accounting for over 22 percent of all adult smokers. Nine percent of Americans over 65 years of age currently smoked.

- All of the major causes of deaths among the elderly are associated with smoking and secondhand smoke.
- Smokers are far more likely to develop Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias.
- Rates of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis, are highest among older adults. It is currently the fourth leading cause of death in the U.S.
- Smoking reduces life expectancy, on average, by 13 to 15 years.
- Men 65 or older who smoke are twice as likely to die from a stroke, and women smokers are about one and a half times as likely to die from a stroke than their nonsmoking counterparts. The risk of dying from ischemic heart disease is 60 percent higher for smokers than nonsmokers 65 or older.
- Quitting smoking has proven health benefits, even at a late age. When an older person quits smoking, circulation improves immediately, and the lungs begin to repair damage. In one year, the added risk of heart disease is cut almost in half, and risk of stroke, lung disease, and cancer diminish.
- Of those who have quit, more than 90 percent have done so on their own, citing these reasons for quitting:
  - To maintain good health
  - To take control of their lives
  - To avoid the unpleasant smell of cigarettes

TOXINS ON THE MOVE: THE RISKS OF SMOKING GROW GREATER

We’ve known cigarettes can hurt you for more than four decades, and current research paints an even grimmer picture.

Surgeon General’s Report

In 1964, the Surgeon General’s Report announced medical research showing that smoking was a definite cause of cancers of the lung and larynx (voice box) in men and chronic bronchitis in both men and women.

The 2004 report concluded that smoking was responsible for various reproductive problems as well as cardiovascular diseases, and cancers of the bladder, esophagus, mouth, and throat.


The 2010 report described in detail the ways tobacco smoke damages every organ in the body and causes disease and death. It also discussed how the Food and Drug Administration, along with the Centers for Disease Control, are working to educate people about the health risks of tobacco use, prevent youth from tobacco products in the first place, expand
access to proven cessation treatments and services, and reduce exposure to secondhand smoke. In 2009, Congress enacted the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, which gave the FDA regulatory authority over tobacco products to protect and promote the health of the American public.

Other effects of smoking facts you should know

- Smokers are less healthy than nonsmokers.
- Smokers use medical care services more often than nonsmokers.
- After surgery, smokers have more problems with wound healing and more respiratory complications.
- For women, smoking causes your bones to lose density after menopause.
- Smoking increases your risk of hip fractures.

- Smoking causes half of all cases of adult periodontitis — a serious gum infection that can cause pain and tooth loss.
- For men, smoking may cause sexual problems.
- Smokers are two to three times more likely to develop cataracts than nonsmokers. Cataracts are a leading cause of blindness in the United States and worldwide.
- Smoking causes peptic ulcers in smokers with Helicobacter pylori infections. Compared with nonsmokers, smokers with this infection are more likely to develop ulcers and to have complications of an ulcer. In severe cases, this condition can lead to death.

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How many chemicals are in cigarettes?

Nicotine is one of the most problematic of all the chemicals in cigarettes. It reaches your brain within 10 seconds after you inhale smoke and it has been found in every organ of the body. But your body gets more than nicotine when you smoke.

In fact, there are more than 4,000 chemicals in cigarette smoke! Some of these chemicals are also in wood varnish, the insect poison DDT, arsenic, nail polish remover, and rat poison. The ashes, tar, gases, and other poisons in cigarettes harm your body over time. They damage your heart and lungs. They also make it harder for you to taste and smell things and to fight infections.

Remember though, that nicotine leaves your body within three days from the day you quit smoking, and your body starts to repair itself immediately. At first you may feel worse instead of better because withdrawal feelings can...
be difficult. But they are a sign that your body is healing.

**How does cigarette smoke cause so much damage?**

Cigarette smoke damages the cells lining the blood vessels and the heart. The damaged tissue swells, thus making it difficult for blood vessels to get enough oxygen to cells and tissues. Your heart and all parts of your body must have oxygen to work properly.

Cigarette smoke also can increase your risk of dangerous blood clots, both because of the swelling and redness and also by causing blood platelets to clump together.

As problematic as smoking can be for one’s own health, it is important to understand that second-hand smoke is unsafe as well. People who do not smoke, but who live or work with smokers, are more likely to develop lung cancer than other nonsmokers. In fact, the CDC estimates that each year 49,000 people die from conditions related to exposure to secondhand smoke.

Secondhand smoke is especially dangerous for someone with asthma and other lung conditions, or heart disease. In fact, it may even cause bronchitis, pneumonia, an asthma attack, or inner ear infections in babies and young children. Everyone should try never to smoke around young children or infants. These problems are just more good reasons why parents and grandparents should make a serious effort to stop smoking.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF TOBACCO CONTROL AND PREVENTION**

**Why is tobacco control and prevention important?**

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States, causing about 443,000 deaths each year. It is a major risk factor for cancer, heart, and lung disease. Many people experience decreased quality of life due to the adverse health consequences of tobacco use.

They also lose longevity. A smoker loses seven minutes of life with each cigarette he or she smokes. Thus, depending on the age that a person starts to smoke, or stops, about seven to 13 years of life may be lost due to smoking-related diseases. Additionally, for every premature death caused each year by smoking, an estimated 20 or more smokers endure a serious smoking-related illness.

Society will ultimately bear substantial direct and indirect economic costs from these diseases. Direct medical expenditures attributed to smoking have risen since the early 1990s and now total more than $96 billion per year. In addition to direct medical expenditures, and $96 billion in lost productivity.

**IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF QUITTING SMOKING**

**The good news: Immediate- and long-term benefits of quitting**

While all of the Surgeon General’s reports reiterate that smoking is a greater health threat than we ever realized, they also point out that quitting smoking has countless immediate and long-term benefits, reducing risks for diseases caused by smoking and improving health in general.

Within minutes and hours after smokers inhale that last cigarette, their bodies begin a series of changes that continue for years. Among these health improvements are a drop in heart rate, improved circulation, and reduced risk of heart attack, lung cancer, and stroke. By quitting smoking today, a smoker can ensure a healthier tomorrow.

**Daily reasons to breathe clean**

Twenty minutes after you quit smoking, your blood pressure drops close to its level before your last cigarette. The temperature of your hands and feet increases, returning to normal.

Eight hours after you quit, the carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.

Twenty-four hours after you quit, your chances of having a heart attack decrease.

A one pack-a-day smoker who pays $5 per pack can expect to save $1,850 per year. In many locales, the cost of smoking is much higher, as state governments often levy additional taxes on cigarettes. In 2010, some brands of cigarettes were selling for $14.50 per pack.

Quitting smoking cleanses your body of harmful substances. More
than 4,000 individual compounds have been identified in tobacco and tobacco smoke. Among these are about 60 compounds that cause cancer.

When you stop smoking, your pets will be happier. Secondhand smoke increases the risk of lung cancer in dogs.

Two weeks to three months after you stop smoking, you have better circulation and your lung function increases by as much as 30 percent.

One to nine months after you quit smoking: coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue, and shortness of breath decrease, and your lungs start to function better, lowering your risk of lung infections.

One year after quitting smoking: you reduce your risk for heart disease by 50 percent.

In the short term, quitting smoking reduces respiratory problems, dental problems, nervousness, depression, and a tendency toward health-damaging behavior.

Quitting smoking reduces facial wrinkles and yellow spots on your fingers and gives you a better sense of taste and smell.

Quitting smoking substantially decreases the risk of lung, laryngeal, esophageal, oral, pancreatic, bladder, and cervical cancers.

When you quit smoking, you stop hurting those around you. The secondhand smoke from your cigarettes can make your family and friends have more colds and asthma attacks. It can also put them at risk for heart and lung diseases, and even lung cancer.

When you stop smoking, you improve your chances for a longer and healthier life.

WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT FOR QUitting

Quitting takes hard work and a lot of effort, but you can quit smoking. So many people want you to succeed, and much support is as close as the nearest telephone or Web site. Start by talking with your family as well as friends and co-workers. Let them know your quit date and ask them to support you during the first few days and weeks. They can help you through the rough spots. Sometimes employers, your health insurance company, or your local hospital can provide additional information about counseling and quit-smoking support groups.

Here are some support options. Which plan seems best for you?

- Phone support
- Online support

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If you want to quit smoking, you can get great support from the American Cancer Society’s Quit for Life program, a free telephone counseling service. This program has helped more than 1 million tobacco users make a plan to quit for good. To learn more about Quit For Life, or for help with any cancer-related question, call any time, day or night: 1.800.227.2345.

Or contact the Smoking Quitline of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) for help with quitting smoking. Another free service, the NCI will answer your questions and provide you with informational materials and other resources to help you be successful. Call (877) 44U.QUIT. NCI’s Smoking Quitline is available to answer your questions on Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., local time.

Online support
The American Lung Association’s popular smoking cessation program, Freedom from Smoking Online, is now available online for FREE.

Books and other self-help materials
The federal government’s new Smoke-Free Web site provides all the support you need to quit smoking now. Download their “Online Guide to Quitting.”

The National Cancer Institute offers smokers an online book with dozens of terrific ideas to guide you from thinking about stopping smoking through quitting for keeps. Download “Clearing the Air — How to Quit Smoking … and Quit for Keeps.”

You can order additional FREE materials on quitting smoking from the U.S. Public Health Service through the Publications Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 8547, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8547. Or call toll-free in the United States at (800) 358-9295. Outside the United States, please call (703) 437-2078. Electronic requests may be made to: ahrqpubs@ahrq.gov.

Additional materials can be downloaded from the Surgeon General’s Web site. These materials include: “You Can Quit Smoking,” and “Good Information for Smokers.”