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Smoking still a major health problem, despite well-known dangers: a Netwellness column

By Plain Dealer guest columnist
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More than 47 million adults and 4 million youth in the United States smoke cigarettes. Rates of smoking have dropped over the years, but the current statistics indicate that smoking is still a major health problem and cigarettes continue to cause chronic diseases and death.

- 12 million Americans have died from smoking since 1964.
- Smoking costs the nation $157.7 billion each year in direct medical costs, lost productivity, and neonatal care.

- About 1 out of every 4 adults and high school students smoke.
- More than 4,000 people smoke their first cigarette each day.

The health consequences of smoking are wide ranging and affect all areas of the body. Smoking is a risk factor for many diseases and conditions, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases, and reproductive problems.

Smoking and Cancer

Lung cancer may immediately come to mind when you think of cancer related to smoking.
Smoking causes 90% of lung cancer deaths in men and 80% of lung cancer deaths in women. However, agents in tobacco smoke can damage genes that control the growth of cells and lead to many types of cancer.

Scientific evidence shows that smoking also causes cancer of the:

- **Cervix**
- **Pancreas**
- **Kidneys**
- **Stomach**
- **Mouth**
- **Throat/Larynx (voice box)**
- **Esophagus**
- **Bladder**
- **Blood (leukemia)**

### Smoking and Cardiovascular Disease

Heart disease and stroke are the first and third leading causes of death, respectively, in the United States. You are up to four times more likely to die from cardiovascular disease if you smoke.

**Atherosclerosis** (hardening and narrowing of the arteries) can lead to blocked blood flow, which causes heart attacks and strokes. Smoking damages the cells lining the blood vessels and the heart. As a result, the tissue swells and it becomes more difficult for oxygen to reach cells and tissues throughout the body.

The risk of **blood clots** also increases with smoking, both from swelling and redness and from the clumping together of blood platelets.

### Smoking and Respiratory Diseases

**Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease** (COPD), also called **emphysema**, is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. Smoking damages lung tissue and airways and causes 90% of these deaths. Lung diseases are often chronic and can cause health problems and decreased quality of life for many years.

Smoking decreases the body’s ability to fight illnesses and results in more upper and lower respiratory tract infections. Chronic coughing and wheezing among adults, teens, and children is also related to smoking.

The good news is that when a person stops smoking, the body begins to heal and can experience immediate benefits. Over time, it is possible for the lungs
to return to normal function and for your risk of coronary heart disease to drop to that of someone who has never smoked.

**Smoking and Reproductive Effects**

Every stage of reproduction can be affected by cigarette smoking. Female smokers may experience difficulty becoming pregnant, complications during pregnancy, premature births, low birth weight babies, stillbirths, and infant death. These outcomes can all be related to smoking.

Babies with low birth weights, considered less than 5.5 pounds, are at greater risk for childhood and adult illnesses and death. The nicotine in cigarettes causes the blood vessels in the umbilical cord and womb to constrict, decreasing the amount of oxygen to the unborn baby. Pregnant women who quit smoking before the last three months of their pregnancy are more likely to deliver a baby close to normal weight.

**Sudden infant death syndrome** (SIDS) occurs less often now that parents know to place babies on their backs while sleeping. However, babies exposed to secondhand smoke after birth have double the risk of dying from SIDS and babies whose mothers smoked during and after pregnancy have three to four times the risk.

**Smoking and Overall Health**

Smoking is damaging to the entire body and decreases overall health. In a smoker’s body, nicotine is found in every organ and breast milk. In addition to the specific health effects described above, smoking also increases the risk of:

- Fractures
- Dental diseases
- Sexual problems
- Eye diseases
- **Peptic ulcers**
- **Cataracts**
- **Pneumonia**
- **Gum disease**

**Calling it quits**

If you are ready to quit smoking, many resources are available to support you through the process:

- **Help for Smokers and Other Tobacco Users**
- **How to Quit Smoking and Reduce Your Risk of Heart Disease**
Quitting Helps You Heal Faster

Quitting Tips

You Can Quit Smoking

Reference

2004 Surgeon General's Report

AARP 50+ Auto Insurance
Over 50? Save up to $402. 9 out of 10 AARP Policyholder's saved.
AARP.TheHartford.com

Microsoft Sharepoint®
Microsoft.com/SharePoint

1 trick of a flat belly
Cut down 3 lbs in a week by keeping this 1 weird secret
www.MyAllNaturalWeightLoss.com

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Posted by cwd83
November 18, 2009, 12:15PM

Smoking also causes...Fire and brimstone coming down from the skies! Rivers and seas boiling! Forty years of darkness! Earthquakes, volcanoes...The dead rising from the grave! Human sacrifice, dogs and cats living together... mass hysteria!

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