

Smoking & Tobacco Cessation



Adverse Health Effects of Smoking

Need a reason to quit cigarettes and tobacco? Smoking harms nearly every organ in your body while wreaking havoc on your health, appearance, and happiness.

Addicted Brain – Nicotine addiction is hard to beat because it changes your brain. The brain develops extra nicotine receptors to accommodate the large doses of nicotine from tobacco. When the brain stops getting the nicotine it's used to, the result is nicotine withdrawal. You may feel anxious, irritable, and have strong cravings for nicotine.

Hearing Loss – One effect of smoking is reduced oxygen supply to the cochlea, a snail-shaped organ in the inner ear. This may result in permanent damage to the cochlea and mild to moderate hearing loss.

Damaged Eyesight – Smoking causes physical changes in the eyes that can threaten your eyesight. One of the effects of nicotine from cigarettes restricts the production of a chemical necessary for you to be able to see at night. Also, smoking increases your risk of developing cataracts and macular degeneration.

Oral Health Problems – Smokers have more oral health problems than non-smokers, like mouth sores, ulcers, and gum disease. You are more likely to have cavities and lose your teeth at a younger age. You are also more likely to get cancers of the mouth and throat.

Skin Damage – Smoking can cause your skin to be dry and lose elasticity, leading to wrinkles and stretch marks. Your skin tone may also become dull and grayish.

Stressed Heart – Smoking raises your blood pressure and puts stress on your heart. Over time, stress on the heart can weaken it, making it less able to pump blood to other parts of your body. Carbon monoxide from inhaled cigarette smoke also contributes to a lack of oxygen, making the heart work even harder. This increases the risk of heart disease, including heart attacks.

Sticky Blood – Smoking makes your blood thick and sticky. The stickier the blood, the harder your heart must work to move it around your body. Sticky blood is also more likely to form blood clots that block blood flow to your heart, brain, and legs. Over time, thick, sticky blood damages the delicate lining of your blood vessels. This damage can increase your risk for a heart attack or stroke.

Fatty Deposits – Smoking increases the cholesterol and unhealthy fats circulating in the blood, leading to unhealthy fatty deposits. Over time, cholesterol, fats, and other debris build up on the walls of your arteries. This buildup narrows the arteries and blocks normal blood flow to the heart, brain, and legs. Blocked blood flow to the heart or brain can cause a heart attack or stroke. Blockage in the blood vessels of your legs could result in the amputation of your toes or feet.

Scarred Lungs – Smokers' lungs experience inflammation in the small airways and tissues of your lungs. This can make your chest feel tight or cause you to wheeze or feel short of breath. Continued inflammation builds up scar tissue, which leads to physical changes to your lungs and airways that can make breathing hard. Years of lung irritation can give you a chronic cough with mucus.

Emphysema – Smoking destroys the tiny air sacs, or alveoli, in the lungs that allow oxygen exchange. When you smoke, you are damaging some of those air sacs. Alveoli don't grow back, so when you destroy them, you have permanently destroyed part of your lungs. When enough alveoli are destroyed, the disease emphysema develops. Emphysema causes severe shortness of breath and can lead to death.

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Cilia and Respiratory Infections – Your airways are lined with tiny brush-like hairs, called cilia. The cilia sweep out mucus and dirt so your lungs stay clear. Smoking temporarily paralyzes and even kills cilia. This makes you more at risk for infection. Smokers get more colds and respiratory infections than non-smokers.

Cancer – Every single puff of a cigarette causes damages to your DNA. When DNA is damaged, your cells can begin growing out of control and create a cancer tumor. Your body tries to repair the damage that smoking does to your DNA, but over time, smoking can wear down this repair system and lead to cancer (like lung cancer). One-third of all cancer deaths are caused by tobacco.

Increased Stomach Fat – Smokers have bigger bellies and less muscle than non-smokers. They are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes, even if they don't smoke every day. Smoking also makes it harder to control diabetes once you already have it. Diabetes is a serious disease that can lead to blindness, heart disease, kidney failure, and amputations.

Lower Estrogen Levels – Smoking lowers a female's level of estrogen. Low estrogen levels can cause dry skin, thinning hair, and memory problems. Women who smoke have a harder time getting pregnant and having a healthy baby. Smoking can also lead to early menopause, which increases your risk of developing certain diseases (like heart disease).

Erectile Dysfunction – Smoking increases the risk of erectile dysfunction. Toxins from cigarette smoke can also damage the genetic material in sperm, which can cause infertility or genetic defects in your children.

High White Blood Cell Count – When you smoke, the number of white blood cells (the cells that defend your body from infections) stays high. This is a sign that your body is under stress—constantly fighting against the inflammation and damage caused by tobacco. White blood cell counts that stay elevated for a long time are linked with an increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, and cancer.

Longer Healing Time – Nutrients, minerals, and oxygen are all supplied to the tissue through the bloodstream. Nicotine causes blood vessels to tighten, which decreases levels of nutrients supplied to wounds. As a result, wounds take longer to heal. Slow wound healing increases the risk of infection after an injury or surgery and painful skin ulcers can develop, causing the tissue to slowly die.

Weakened Immune System – Cigarette smoke contains high levels of tar and other chemicals, which can make your immune system less effective at fighting off infections. This means you're more likely to get sick. Continued weakening of the immune system can make you more vulnerable to autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis. It also decreases your body's ability to fight off cancer.

Muscle Deterioration – When you smoke, less blood and oxygen flow to your muscles, making it harder to build muscle. The lack of oxygen also makes muscles tire more easily. Smokers have more muscle aches and pains than non-smokers.

Weakened Bones – Ingredients in cigarette smoke disrupt the natural cycle of bone health. Your body is less able to form healthy new bone tissue, and it breaks down existing bone tissue more rapidly. Over time, smoking leads to a thinning of bone tissue and loss of bone density. This causes bones to become weak and brittle. Compared to non-smokers, smokers have a higher risk of bone fractures, and their broken bones take longer to heal.

Source: National Cancer Institute (www.smokefree.gov)