



Cigarette Smoking

The 1982 United States Surgeon General’s report stated that “Cigarette smoking is the major single cause of cancer mortality [death] in the United States.” This statement is as true today as it was then.

Tobacco use is responsible for nearly 1 in 5 deaths in the United States. Because smoking and tobacco use are acquired behaviors – activities that people choose to do – smoking is the most preventable cause of death in our society.

Who smokes cigarettes?

Adults

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that about 42 million US adults were cigarette smokers in 2012 (the most recent year for which numbers are available). This is 18% of all adults (21% of men, 16% of women) – a bit under 1 in 5 people.

When broken down by race/ethnicity, the numbers were as follows:

Whites	19.7%
African Americans	18.1%
Hispanics	12.5%
American Indians/Alaska Natives	21.8%
Asian Americans	10.7%
Multi-racial people	26.1%

Also according to CDC’s 2012 data, there were more cigarette smokers in younger age groups than in elders. Part of this may be due to early deaths in older smokers:

Ages 18-24	17.3%
Ages 25-44	21.6%
Ages 45-64	19.5%
65 and older	8.9%

High school and middle school students

Nationwide, 14% of high school students were smoking cigarettes in 2012. This does not include the 13% that smoked cigars, most of which are now small, filtered, and sold in packs just like cigarettes. They're included here because most people who smoke these little cigars use them just like cigarettes, smoking several a day and inhaling the smoke. Kids like them because they cost less and can have chocolate, fruit, and other candy flavors added – unlike cigarettes (see our document *Cigar Smoking*).

The most recent survey of middle school students, done in 2012, shows that about 4% were smoking cigarettes, and nearly 3% smoked cigars (again, despite falling into the legal definition of “large cigars” most of these are small and filtered. They're smoked like cigarettes and, except for the color, look like cigarettes.) In both high schools and middle schools, white and Hispanic students were more likely to smoke cigarettes than other races/ethnicities. But far more black students used cigars.

For more information, see our document called *Child and Teen Tobacco Use*.

What kinds of illness and death are caused by smoking cigarettes?

About half of all Americans who keep smoking will die because of the habit. Each year about 480,000 people in the United States die from illnesses related to tobacco use. Smoking cigarettes kills more Americans than alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, homicide, and illegal drugs combined.

Cancers caused by smoking

Cigarette smoking accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths. It's linked with an increased risk of these cancers:

- Lung
- Larynx (voice box)

- Oral cavity (mouth, tongue, and lips)
- Nose and sinuses
- Pharynx (throat)
- Esophagus (tube connecting the throat to the stomach)
- Stomach
- Pancreas
- Cervix
- Kidney
- Bladder
- Ovary (a type called *mucinous ovarian cancer*)
- Colorectum (the colon and/or the rectum)
- Acute myeloid leukemia

Smoking accounts for 87% of lung cancer deaths in men and 70% in women. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in both men and women, and is one of the hardest cancers to treat.

Lung cancer can often be prevented. Some religious groups that promote non-smoking as part of their religion, such as Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists, have much lower rates of lung cancer and other smoking-related cancers.

Other health problems caused by smoking

As serious as cancer is, it accounts for less than half of the deaths related to smoking each year. Smoking is a major cause of many other deadly health problems – heart disease, aneurysms, bronchitis, emphysema, and stroke.

Using tobacco can damage a woman's reproductive health and hurt babies. Tobacco use is linked with reduced fertility and a higher risk of miscarriage, early delivery (premature birth), and stillbirth. It's also a cause of low birth-weight in infants. It has been linked to a higher risk of birth defects and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), too. For more on this, see our document called *Women and Smoking*.

Smoking can make pneumonia and asthma worse and it has been linked to other health problems, including gum disease, cataracts, bone thinning, hip fractures, and peptic ulcers. Some studies have also linked smoking to macular degeneration, an eye disease that can cause blindness.

Smoking can cause or worsen poor blood flow in the arms and legs (*peripheral vascular disease* or PVD.) Surgery to improve the blood flow often doesn't work in people who keep smoking. Because of this, many vascular surgeons (surgeons who work on blood vessels) won't do certain surgeries on patients with PVD unless they stop smoking.

The smoke from cigarettes (called *secondhand smoke* or *environmental tobacco smoke*) can also have harmful health effects on those exposed to it. Adults and children can have health problems from breathing secondhand smoke. (See our document called *Secondhand Smoke*.)

Smoking affects how long you live and your quality of life

Cigarette smokers die younger than non-smokers. In fact, according to a study done in the late 1990s by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), smoking shortened male smokers' lives by 13.2 years and female smokers' lives by 14.5 years. Men and women who smoke are much more likely to die between the ages of 35 and 69 than those who have never smoked. Stopping smoking by age 40 reduces loss of life by about 90%, but quitting at any age can reduce the risk of early death.

But not all of the health problems related to smoking result in deaths. Smoking affects a smoker's health in many ways, harming nearly every organ of the body and causing many diseases. The diseases often seen include chronic bronchitis, emphysema, heart attacks, strokes, and cancer. And some studies have found that male smokers may be more likely to be sexually impotent (have erectile dysfunction or ED) than non-smokers.

These problems can steal away a person's quality of life long before death. Smoking-related illness can limit a person's daily life by making it harder to breathe, get around, work, or play. Quitting smoking, especially at younger ages, can reduce smoking-related disability.

Are any types of cigarettes safe to smoke?

No. All cigarettes cause damage, and any tobacco smoking is dangerous. All tobacco is addictive.

Some people try to make their smoking habit safer by smoking fewer cigarettes, which most smokers find quite hard to do. Sadly, research has found that even smoking as few as 1 to 4 cigarettes a day can lead to serious health outcomes, including an increased risk of heart disease and a greater chance of dying at a younger age.

Smokers once believed that "light" cigarettes meant lower health risk. This is not true. Studies found that the risk of serious health effects is not lower in smokers of light or low-tar cigarettes. Because of this, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has banned use of the terms "light," "mild," and "low" in any cigarette sales unless the FDA

specifically allows it – and so far, they haven't. But this rule doesn't apply to the small cigarette-like cigars (see our document *Cigar Smoking*).

Some people think hand-rolled cigarettes are a cheaper and healthier way to smoke, but they are no safer than commercial brands. In fact, life-long smokers of hand-rolled cigarettes have been found to have a higher risk of cancers of the larynx (voice box), esophagus (swallowing tube), mouth, and pharynx (throat) when compared with smokers of machine-made cigarettes.

Some cigarettes are now being sold as “all natural.” They are marketed as having no chemicals or additives and rolled with 100% cotton filters. There's no proof they are healthier or safer than other cigarettes, nor is there good reason to think they would be. All smoke from cigarettes, natural or otherwise, contains many agents that cause cancer (carcinogens) and toxins that come from burning the tobacco itself, including tar and carbon monoxide.

Even herbal cigarettes that do not contain tobacco give off tar, particulates, and carbon monoxide and are dangerous to your health.

What about menthol cigarettes – aren't they safer?

Menthol cigarettes are not safer than unflavored cigarettes. In fact, they might even be more dangerous. These cigarettes tend to be “easier” to smoke – the added menthol produces a cooling sensation in the throat when the smoke is inhaled. It lessens the cough reflex and covers the dry feeling in the throat that smokers often have. People who smoke menthol cigarettes can inhale deeper and hold the smoke in longer.

Nearly one-third (32%) of all cigarettes sold in the United States are flavored with menthol. These cigarettes are most popular among children, teens, African-Americans, Hispanics, and smokers in other minority groups.

Studies have shown that people who smoke menthol cigarettes are less likely to try to quit and are less likely to succeed when they do try. At least one researcher proposed that menthol smokers might want to switch to non-menthol cigarettes before they quit to improve their chances of quitting smoking.

Most people don't know that many cigarette brands that are not advertised as having menthol often have a small amount of menthol added. Even amounts of menthol that are too small to taste can make a cigarette seem smoother and less harsh. These small amounts of menthol can ease the path for new smokers.

No matter what they smell like, taste like, look like, or are labeled as, all cigarettes are bad for you. The bottom line is there's no such thing as a safe smoke.

Are e-cigarettes safe?

Electronic cigarettes or e-cigarettes are designed to look like cigarettes. When the smoker puffs on it, the system delivers a mist of liquid, flavorings, and nicotine that looks something like smoke. The smoker inhales it, and the nicotine is absorbed into the lungs. Some people think they can be used to help people give up tobacco.

The makers of e-cigarettes say that they are safe, but this only means the ingredients have been found to be safe to eat. Inhaling a substance is not the same as swallowing it. There are questions about how safe it is to inhale some substances in the e-cigarette vapor into the lungs. Since e-cigarettes are not labeled with their ingredients, the user doesn't know what's in them. The amounts of nicotine and other substances a person gets from each cartridge are also unclear.

A study done by the FDA found cancer-causing substances in half the e-cigarette samples tested. Other impurities were also found, including one sample with diethylene glycol, a toxic ingredient found in antifreeze.

Studies have shown that e-cigarettes can cause short-term lung changes that are much like those caused by regular cigarettes. But long-term health effects are still unclear. This is an active area of research.

We do know that electronic cigarettes are designed to deliver nicotine, and nicotine is addictive. This strongly suggests that e-cigarette use will lead to dependence, unless the user weans him or herself from them. A CDC survey published in 2013 showed that e-cigarette use in middle school and high school students doubled between 2011 and 2012, with 10% of high school students and 3% of middle school kids using them and risking addiction to nicotine. Among high school students, 80% smoked regular cigarettes and used e-cigarettes at the same time.

Because the American Cancer Society doesn't yet know whether e-cigarettes are safe and effective, we cannot recommend them to help people quit smoking. There are proven methods available to help people quit, including pure forms of inhalable nicotine as well as nasal sprays, gums, and patches.

Until electronic cigarettes are scientifically proven to be safe and effective, ACS will support the regulation of e-cigarettes and laws that treat them like all other tobacco products.

A word about nicotine

Although other substances in cigarettes are known to cause cancer, nicotine is the addictive substance in tobacco. Nicotine is an addictive drug just like heroin and cocaine, and it keeps people coming back for more. Anyone who starts smoking or using tobacco in other forms can become addicted to nicotine.

What you can do

The best thing you can do is never smoke a cigarette or use any other form of tobacco. It's also important to avoid all forms of tobacco smoke.

If you want to learn more about the dangers of tobacco smoke, or want to learn more about quitting cigarettes, please see our *Guide to Quitting Smoking*. You can also call us at 1-800-227-2345 for information and support.

To learn more

More information from your American Cancer Society

Here is more information you might find helpful. You also can order free copies of our documents from our toll-free number, **1-800-227-2345**, or read them on our website, www.cancer.org.

If you or someone you care about is trying to quit

Guide to Quitting Smoking (also in Spanish)

Increase Your Chances of Quitting Smoking

Quitting Smoking: Help for Cravings and Tough Situations (also in Spanish)

Helping a Smoker Quit: Do's and Don'ts

More on tobacco, smoking, and secondhand smoke

Questions About Smoking, Tobacco, and Health (also in Spanish)

Women and Smoking (also in Spanish)

Child and Teen Tobacco Use (also in Spanish)

Cigar Smoking (also in Spanish)

Secondhand Smoke (also in Spanish)

Tobacco-Related Cancers Fact Sheet

Cancer screening

American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Early Detection of Cancer (also in Spanish)

Lung Cancer Prevention and Early Detection

National organizations and websites*

Along with the American Cancer Society, other sources of information and support include:

Nicotine Anonymous (NicA)

Toll-free number: 1-877-879-6422 (1-877-TRY-NICA)

Website: www.nicotine-anonymous.org

For free information on their 12-step program, meeting schedules and locations, print materials, or information on how to start a group in your area

QuitNet

Website: www.quitnet.com

Offers free, cutting-edge services to people trying to quit tobacco

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Office of Smoking and Health

Free quit support line: 1-800-784-8669 (1-800-QUIT-NOW)

TTY: 1-800-332-8615

Website: www.cdc.gov/tobacco

The quit support line offers information on smoking and health as well as help with quitting. Languages and range of services vary by your state of residence

National Cancer Institute

Free tobacco line: 1-877-448-7848 (1-877-44U-QUIT) (also available in Spanish)

Direct tobacco website: www.smokefree.gov

Quitting information, quit-smoking guide, and phone counseling are offered, as well as referral to state telephone-based quit programs (if needed for special services)

**Inclusion on this list does not imply endorsement by the American Cancer Society.*

No matter who you are, we can help. Contact us anytime, day or night, for information and support. Call us at **1-800-227-2345** or visit www.cancer.org.

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