

## **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 cigarette 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 43.8 million US adults were cigarette smokers in 2011 (the most recent year for which numbers are available). This is 19% of all adults (21.6% of men, 16.5% of women) – about 1 out of 5 people.

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

Whites	20.6%
African Americans	19.4%
Hispanics	12.9%
American Indians/Alaska Natives	31.5%
Asian Americans	9.9%
Multi-racial people	27.4%

There were more cigarette smokers in the younger age groups. In 2011, the CDC reported 22.1% of people 25 to 44 years old were current smokers, compared with 7.9% of those aged 65 or older.

### High school and middle school students

Nationwide, 18% of high school students were smoking cigarettes in 2011. The most recent survey of middle school students, done in 2011, shows that about 4% were smoking cigarettes. In both high schools and middle schools, white and Hispanic students were more likely to smoke cigarettes than other races/ethnicities.

For more information, see our document, 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 443,000 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 is 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. 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.

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 documents called *Secondhand Smoke* and *Women and Smoking*.)

# Effects of smoking on 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.

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 are 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) 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.

## Is there a safe way to smoke cigarettes?

No. All cigarettes cause damage. 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.

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.

About one-fourth (27%) 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.

#### 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 nicotine 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 Web site, 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)

#### **Cancer screening**

American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Early Detection of Cancer

Lung Cancer (Non-Small Cell); see section "Can non-small cell lung cancer be found early?"

### National organizations and Web sites\*

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)

Web site: 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

Web site: 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

Web site: 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 Web site: <a href="www.smokefree.gov">www.smokefree.gov</a>

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)

#### **American Heart Association**

Toll-free number: 1-800-242-8721 (1-800-AHA-USA-1)

Web site: www.americanheart.org

Quitting tips and advice can be found at www.everydaychoices.org or by calling 1-866-399-6789

#### **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

Telephone: 202-272-0167 Web site: www.epa.gov

Has advice on how to protect children from secondhand smoke, a Smoke-free Homes Pledge, and other tobacco-related materials on the direct Web site, www.epa.gov/smokefree, or at 1-866-766-5337 (1-866-SMOKE-FREE)

\*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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