

STEPS TO WELLNESS – LESSON 8

The Smoking Debate

When the dangers of smoking were poorly understood, the majority of smokers believed that it was beneficial to health. But that's not still the case. In 1964 the US Surgeon General released a major report on the health risks of smoking, with these words: "few medical questions have stirred such public interest or created more scientific debate than the tobacco-health controversy."¹

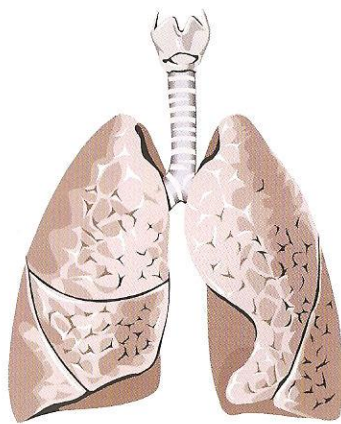
Today smoking is becoming a "no-no." The tobacco industry continues to defend its product by the assertion that the health risks aren't proved, but this is contradicted by their own industry-supported research, which has been largely consistent with other medical evidence, that "smoking is a major cause of numerous diseases."²

So why are people still smoking? Why is the smoking rate for teenagers – particularly girls – increasing? Why are women more at risk now from smoking-related illness than in the past? Why are tobacco companies still sponsoring events that give their product a "nice" image? And why is there such a strong movement in western societies, against smoking? This lesson looks at the issues.

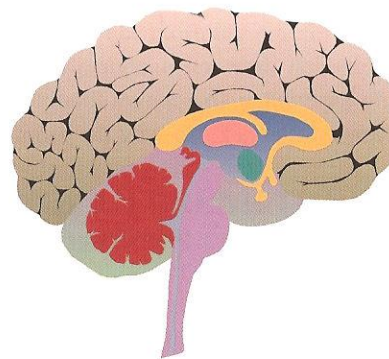
SMOKING IS BAD NEWS

Smoking is one of the greatest preventable causes of disease in the world today. Tobacco products kill more than 400,000 people each year.³

What was thought to be a harmless, interesting custom by those who first smoked several hundred years ago has now changed into death-dealing addiction, since the invention of cigarettes. As smoking has increased, an alarming increase in the cases of lung cancer has also been noted by doctors in different parts of the world. Today, lung cancer, which used to be rare, is the number one cancer in much of the world. Cigarette smoking causes more than 80% of lung cancer cases.⁴ For a smoker the chances of dying from lung cancer are 700% greater than that of those who have never smoked on a regular basis.⁵ When the CDC compared the average number of cigarettes those dead smokers had puffed with the number of years they lost, the average cigarette took one minute from a person's life.⁶



How does smoking harm the body? The act of smoking and the result of the heat in the cigarette produce certain tars and other harmful substances. These are inhaled into the delicate linings of the mouth and bronchial tree of the lungs. Some are absorbed into the blood stream. Nicotine is the most familiar poison in tobacco. The hot, dry smoke contains over 1,000 chemicals, 30 of which are poisonous to the body. Some 16 have been found capable of stimulating the development of cancer. These harmful substances are deposited on lung passages, irritating them and causing a chronic smoker's cough. The harmful effects and hazards are related to the duration of smoking, the amount smoked, and inhaling. It may take 20 years for lung cancer to develop, but if a person begins smoking at the age of 14, he may become ill just when his family and his community need him most.



A smoker does not have to wait for 20 years in order to get the harmful effects in his body. Carbon monoxide, a deadly gas which is present in automobile exhaust fumes, is also present in tobacco smoke. It decreases the oxygen supply to the brain by as much as 15%. When you smoke you impair your mental ability. In a study of a large group of students, it was found that 8% of students with an A average smoked, but 60% of those with a D or lower average smoked.

Research shows that cigarettes may be more harmful to the developing fetus than cocaine. Exposure to cigarettes produced a reduction in some brain nerve cells.⁷ Smoking mothers are almost twice as likely to give birth to a dead baby as non-smoking mothers, and their babies that do live have on the average a lighter birth weight as well.

Another effect that smoking has on the body, is on the heart. Just a few puffs of a cigarette will greatly increase the heart beat and the blood pressure. In fact, there is hardly a part of the body system which is not adversely affected by the poisons contained in tobacco smoke.

WHY DO PEOPLE SMOKE

Usually the reason someone smokes the first cigarette is different from the reasons people continue to smoke.

There are a variety of reasons why people take that first puff – peer pressure, wanting to look grown up, be cool, sexy, sophisticated or tough, or to go along with friends and family who smoke. Advertising can spark an interest or reinforce the desires to smoke your problems away. Statistics show that when a brand of cigarettes increased its advertising budget by 10% the adult market increased 3% but the youth market increased 9%.⁸ This may be why the average age a person tries the first cigarette is 13 years old,⁹ and there are three-million teens who are smokers today, consuming one-billion packs a year.¹⁰



For most people their first draw on a cigarette is a spluttering, coughing experience, that makes them feel light-headed and even a little sick. So why do people continue to smoke?

Amazingly, the body adapts to this poisonous attack, but at considerable cost.

People usually continue to smoke for the following reasons:

Addiction – As blood levels of nicotine and other chemicals drop, another cigarette is needed. As the result, over a period of time a dependence is formed and the smoker actually feels a physical need for a cigarette.

Habit – The average smoker who smokes 20-30 cigarettes a day, develops and reinforces the neuromuscular habit of lighting up, until it becomes an almost automatic or subconscious reaction.

Enjoyment – Some people smoke for pure enjoyment – when socializing with friends, relaxing after a meal, etc.

Boredom – At times of boredom many people smoke. Others may eat, drink, or fiddle with an object. There are many better ways to spend time!

Peer Pressure and Family Influences – While we all like to think of ourselves as individuals, there are many ways we try to conform to those around us, and smoking is one of them.

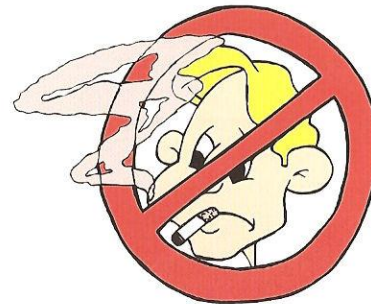
Stress – Because smoking can have a calming influence, it's often used as a coping strategy for stress. Smoking as a coping strategy is treating the symptoms and not addressing the life situations that are causing the stress reactions, and ultimately it causes more and more serious problems.

EFFECTS ON NON-SMOKERS

The smoker is not the only one who is affected by the tobacco smoke. Second-hand smoke kills 65,000 every year. The sidestream smoke from a cigarette has in some cases an even higher concentration of toxic chemicals than the smoke that goes to the lungs of the smoker: two times as much tar and nicotine, five times as much carbon monoxide, and 50 times as much ammonia.¹¹ All of these are harmful to the body. The mortality rate for wives of husbands who smoked more than 20 cigarettes per day more than doubled, as compared to the risk of death for women married to non-smoking husbands.¹²

HOW TO BREAK THE HABIT

It is important for a smoker to understand that the best way to quit smoking is to stop all at once. The hardest part usually comes in the first three days, but by the end of five days the majority of individuals find the craving for cigarettes definitely less or gone. Stay with it for 10 days and you can consider yourself a conqueror.



First, smokers have to **want** to stop. They had to learn to be smokers, so when they stop they have to learn to be non-smokers. Make the **decision** to stop. The next step is to choose the **day** you will stop. On this day get rid of all the smoker's gear, like spare packs of cigarettes, ash trays, lighters, etc...

When persons have decided to stop smoking, the psychological or mental cravings they experience for a cigarette is one of the major problems they have to learn to deal with constructively. This is why many quitting smokers do not stay stopped. An ex-smoker should always be aware of this.

Here are ten weapons to kill an urge:

Affirm – I prefer to be smoke-free. I choose to be tobacco-free. I love being free from smoking.

Brush -- your teeth with mint toothpaste; your hair; your body with a soft towel.

Chew – vegetable sticks (celery, carrots), sunflower seeds, sugarless gum.

Drink – water every hour, and fruit and vegetable juices.

Exercise – with a walk, light calisthenics, relaxation exercises.

Freshen-up – with five deep breaths, a warm shower, personal grooming.

Go for – a five minute break, get help from a friend.

Hold – out for five minutes; onto a friend; something in your hands

Imagine – your life free of cigarettes; refusing a cigarette; stopping a “nic” attack.

Join – a support group, a service club, an anti-smoking movement.

References

- 1 U.S. Surgeon General (1980). Health Consequences of Smoking for Women, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- 2 Winstanly M (1989), Tobacco in Australia: Facts and Issues, ASH (Australia).
- 3 U.S. News and World Report, Dec. 30 1996
- 4 Diet and Nutrition Letter, Dec. 1996
- 5 How to Stop Smoking Without Gaining Weight, P.6
- 6 The Tennessean, Friday, August 27, 1993
- 7 JAMA 271(8)576-578, Feb. 23, 1994
- 8 Associated Press Washington, April 3, 1996
- 9 U.S. News and World Report, Dec. 30 1996
- 10 Associated Press, Washington, April 3, 1996
- 11 Journal of Health and Healing, Vol. 19, Number 2, p.4
- 12 Ibid.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

T F (True or False)

- ___ ___ 1. Smoking is one of the greatest preventable causes of disease in the world today.
- ___ ___ 2. In the middle 1900s most people believed smoking was beneficial to health.
- ___ ___ 3. A smokers chances of dying from lung cancer is not much higher than that of a non-smoker.
- ___ ___ 4. The average cigarette takes one minute from a person's life.
- ___ ___ 5. Cigarette smoke has more than 10 chemicals that are capable of stimulating the development of cancer.
- ___ ___ 6. Smoking does not impair your mental ability although it has other harmful effects.
- ___ ___ 7. Smoking lowers the heart rate and the blood pressure slightly.
- ___ ___ 8. Cigarette advertising is targeted toward youth.
- ___ ___ 9. Smoking can be used as a coping strategy against stress.
- ___ ___ 10. Second hand smoke kills about 65,000 people every year and has a higher concentration of toxic chemicals.
- ___ ___ 11. The best way to quit smoking is to cut back a little at a time until one can finally be free.
- ___ ___ 12. Drinking plenty of water (8-12 glasses of per day) will help one stop smoking.