Saint Louis University Cancer Center

Tobacco and Cancer

What you should know about tobacco use and cancer.

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FACTS ABOUT TOBACCO USE AND CANCER

You may already know it’s hard to quit using tobacco – whether you smoke it or chew it – and there’s a good reason for why. Tobacco contains nicotine, which is a highly toxic and addictive drug. However, the importance of quitting tobacco is hard to argue because:

• More than 400,000 deaths in the United States each year are from smoking-related illnesses.
• Smokers’ chances of getting lung cancer are 10 times greater than those of nonsmokers.
• In addition to being responsible for 87 percent of lung cancers, smoking has been linked to cancers of the mouth, throat, pancreas, cervix, kidney and bladder.
• Using smokeless tobacco can cause cancer of the cheeks, gums and throat.
• Tobacco use is a major cause of heart disease, and it has been associated with conditions ranging from colds and gastric ulcers to chronic bronchitis, emphysema and stroke.

You may have heard these or other gloomy statistics before. If so, you should also be aware that smoking is the most preventable cause of death in our society. Once you stop smoking, your health benefits begin almost immediately:

• After 20 minutes, your blood pressure drops to a level close to what it was before the last cigarette.
• After eight hours, the carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
• Two weeks to three months later, your circulation improves and your lung function increases up to 30 percent.
• One to nine months later, your coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue and shortness of breath decrease.
• After one year, your excess risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker’s.
• After five years, your risk of stroke is reduced to that of a nonsmoker’s.
• After 10 years, your lung cancer death rate is about half that of a continuing smoker’s, and your risk of mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidneys and pancreas cancer decreases.

This brochure is designed to provide you with information about lung cancer, one of the major diseases caused by smoking, and give you some guidance on ways to stop using tobacco. Let’s start by answering some basic questions.
WHAT ARE THE LUNGS?
The lungs are a pair of spongelike, cone-shaped organs that are part of the respiratory system. The right lung has three sections or lobes; the left lung has two lobes. When we breathe in, we take in oxygen, which our body’s cells need to live and carry out their normal functions. When we breathe out, the lungs get rid of carbon dioxide, a waste product of the body’s cells.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS FOR DEVELOPING LUNG CANCER?
Everyone has some possibility of developing lung cancer, but some people have higher risk factors. Risk factors are things that increase your chance of developing the disease. Some of the risk factors listed below are associated with environmental causes or your health, but most are linked with one personal habit - use of tobacco. If you fall into any of the following groups, you should be aware that your risk for developing lung cancer is increased. However, not everyone at high risk develops lung cancer.

- personal use of cigarettes, cigars and pipes
- exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, otherwise known as second-hand smoke (the smoke in the air when someone else smokes)
- exposure to radon, an invisible, odorless and tasteless radioactive gas that occurs naturally in soil and rock
- exposure to asbestos, a group of minerals that occur naturally as fibers and are used in certain industries
- exposure to air pollutants, such as by-products of the combustion of diesel and other fossil fuels (researchers are still working to discover the relationship between pollution and lung cancer)
- personal history of a lung disease such as tuberculosis
- personal history of lung cancer

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT LUNG CANCER?
Researchers continue to study the causes of lung cancer and to search for ways of preventing it. But the best way of preventing the disease is already known - quit smoking or never start. The sooner you quit smoking, the better, but it’s never too late to benefit from quitting.
WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LUNG CANCER?

Common signs and symptoms of lung cancer include:
• a cough that doesn’t go away and gets worse over time
• constant chest pain
• coughing up blood
• shortness of breath, wheezing or hoarseness
• repeated problems with pneumonia or bronchitis
• swelling of the neck and face
• loss of appetite or weight loss
• fatigue

These symptoms may be caused by lung cancer or by other, less serious conditions. If you have any of these symptoms, it’s important to check with your doctor to find out the cause.

WHAT CAN I DO TO STOP USING TOBACCO?

People use tobacco for different reasons. Some feel it gives them more energy or it relaxes them when they are tense, some like touching and handling cigarettes, and some simply find smoking pleasurable. Still others crave cigarettes - they are addicted to the nicotine in tobacco.

For as many reasons people have to smoke, there are an equal number of ways to quit. Finding the best way for you is key to your success. Following are some tips for kicking the habit:

Prepare yourself for quitting
• Decide positively that you want to quit and set a date. List all the reasons you want to quit. Every night before going to bed, repeat one of those reasons 10 times.
• Notice when and why you smoke. Then begin changing your smoking routine. For instance, keep your cigarettes in a different place. Smoke with your other hand. Don’t do anything else while smoking. Smoke only in certain places.
• When you want a cigarette, wait a few minutes. Buy one pack of cigarettes at a time. Switch to a brand you don’t like. Cut down on the number of cigarettes you smoke. Smoke only half of each cigarette. Each day, postpone lighting your first cigarette by one hour. Decide you’ll only smoke during odd or even hours of the day.
• Have realistic expectations: Understand that withdrawal symptoms are temporary, usually lasting only 1–2 weeks. Know that most relapses occur in the first week after quitting. Other relapses occur in the first three months after quitting when you encounter stressful situations. Realize that most successful ex-smokers quit for good only after five to seven attempts.

On the day you quit
• Get rid of all your cigarettes. Put away your ashtrays and lighters.
• Have your teeth cleaned to get rid of tobacco stains.
• Change your morning routine.
• Stay busy. When you get the urge to smoke, do something else instead.
• Carry other things in your mouth, like gum, hard candy or a toothpick.
• Reward yourself at the end of the day for not smoking - buy a treat, see a movie or enjoy your favorite meal.

Immediately after quitting
• Develop a clean, fresh, nonsmoking environment at home and work.
• For the first few days, spend as much time as possible in places where smoking isn’t allowed.
• Drink large quantities of water and fruit juice, but not soda with caffeine.
• Avoid beverages you associate with smoking.

• Instead of smoking after meals, get up from the table and brush your teeth or go for a walk.
• For the first one to three weeks, avoid situations you strongly associate with the pleasurable aspects of smoking.

Quitting for keeps - seven coping skills
When you feel the urge to smoke:

1. Think about why you quit.
2. Know when you are rationalizing. Common rationalizations include:
   – “I’m under a lot of stress, and smoking relaxes me.”
   – “I’ve already cut down to a safe level.”
   – “It’s too hard to quit. I don’t have the willpower.”
   – “I’m worried about gaining weight.”
   – “I blew it. I smoked a cigarette.”
3. Anticipate triggers and prepare to avoid them.
4. Reward yourself for not smoking.
5. Use relaxation techniques.
6. Get social support.
7. Sign a contract with yourself to remain a nonsmoker.
If you slip and smoke, don’t be discouraged. Instead, recognize that you have had a slip. A small setback does not make you a smoker again. Don’t be too hard on yourself. Identify the trigger.

If you think you need professional help, see your doctor. He or she can refer you to a behavior modification program and may also prescribe nicotine replacement therapy in the form of nicotine gum or a nicotine patch.

The Grand Vision Cancer Information Center at Saint Louis University Hospital offers a seven session smoking cessation program developed by the American Lung Association. The hospital cancer information specialists can also provide you with material developed by the National Cancer Institute that gives step-by-step approaches to quitting smoking. For more information, contact the Grand Vision Cancer Information Center at (314) 268-7015.

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY CANCER CENTER

Our standing as an academic medical center puts it at the forefront in developing and providing the latest in cancer screening techniques and tests and medical treatment and procedures for cancer patients.

For more information on the cancer programs available through the Saint Louis University Cancer Center, call (314) 268-7015 or toll-free (866) 977-4440.