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Smoking - Why Quit?

Definition

Smoking is the action of inhaling and emitting smoke or a visible vapour whilst burning tobacco. People smoke for many different reasons: peer pressure, social activity or addiction to substances in the tobacco. Giving up cigarettes can be easier if the smoker is aware of the positive effects of quitting.

Description

Smoking Kills - it is a major cause of death. One in two lifetime smokers will die from their habit. Half of these deaths will occur in middle age.

Cigarettes are poisonous and coat the lungs with tar - tobacco smoke contains over 4000 chemicals; 43 are known to cause cancer and 2 are radioactive. Nicotine, carbon monoxide, arsenic and ammonia are some of the chemicals found in cigarette smoke. Tar is a combination of many chemicals that coat the lungs with black soot. Nicotine is not only poisonous, but also highly addictive.

Smoking causes emphysema and lung cancer - slow and often fatal diseases that can cause years of suffering. Quitting halves the risk of lung cancer after ten years. Quitting at any age will have immediate health benefits. This applies to people with and without diseases caused by smoking.

Smoking causes bladder cancer - smokers are at least 2.5 times more likely than non-smokers to develop bladder cancer. Heavy smokers (more than 40 per day) have up to 11 times the risk.

Smoking causes around 1 in 5 deaths from heart disease - quitting halves the risk of heart disease within 12 months.

Smoking can cause premature ageing - by starving the skin (and other tissues) of oxygen. Dry, grey skin and premature wrinkling around the eyes and mouth are two possible consequences of smoking. Cigarette tar also stains the teeth and fingers.

Smoking reduces fertility in men and women - Impotence and a reduction in sperm quality are possible in men who smoke. Women who smoke take longer to conceive and are more likely to have a miscarriage .

Smoking costs money - and is an expensive habit. Giving up can be like getting a pay rise.

The following describes the changes in a smoker's body once they quit.

- within 2 hours, nicotine starts to exit from the body.
- within 6 hours, heart beat and blood pressure begin to return to normal.
- within 24 hours, carbon monoxide is excreted from the body and lung efficiency improves.

- within 2 days, the ex-smoker starts to feel and smell fresher, tastebuds come alive and the sense of smell returns.
- within 3 days, the lungs will start to improve and you will be less short of breath.
- within 4 days, accumulated phlegm loosens in lungs, within 3 months the cilia, the lung's natural cleaning mechanism, will be completely recovered.
- within 3 weeks, your breathing will improve and your lungs will be working better and exercising will be easier.
- within 6 weeks, blood flow to the limbs improves, the ex-smoker has more energy, and feels a sense of pride and satisfaction.
- after 2 months, the lung's cleaning mechanisms are working normally and after 3 months, sperm quality and number will return to normal.
- after 5 years, risk of sudden death from heart attack is almost the same as that of a smoker.
- after 10-15 years, your risk of death from all causes will be almost identical to that of a non-smoker.

Organisations & support groups

For more help and information see the Smoking Support Groups topic on the Healthpoint.

Pharmacist's advice

Ask your pharmacist for advice. Your Pharmacist:

- 1) Can advise you about quitting. They can assist you to understand nicotine addiction and advise you on the impact Smoking has on your health.
- 2) Can recommend **nicotine replacement therapy** to help break the habit. This may include **nicotine gum, patches, nasal sprays or inhalers**. See the Anti-smoking Products topic on the Healthpoint.
- 3) May be able to refer you to local Smoking cessation services and support groups.
- 4) Can give ongoing encouragement and support.

DISCLAIMER : This information is an educational aid only. It is not intended to replace medical advice for individual conditions or treatments. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist, nurse or naturopath before following any medical regimen to see whether it is safe and effective for you.