Why Quitting Smoking is Important

Since 1964 when the Surgeon General of the United States released his report linking smoking to a wide range of respiratory diseases including cancer, Americans have known of the potential hazards of cigarette/ pipe use. Following that report, the rate of smoking in adults has gradually decreased from 42.4% in 1965, 20.9% in 2005, and 17.8% in 2013; 20.5% in men and 15.3% in women.. However, while we have made progress, there is still a great need to encourage tobacco cessation. We now know that smoking is responsible for many other diseases. Use of tobacco products has become the largest single preventable cause of death in America. Below is a brief discussion of some of the many links between smoking and systemic disease.

Tobacco Use and Systemic Diseases

Cardiovascular Disease: Cigarette smoke damages the lining of blood vessels and begins the process of atherosclerosis (plaque that blocks the blood vessels). This in turn leads to all forms of heart disease including angina (chest pain), heart attack, irregular heart beats, stroke, and sudden death. In 2011, it was estimated that there were 174,500 deaths from cardiovascular diseases directly related to smoking; and 46,000 deaths from exposure to second hand smoke.

Lung Diseases: Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of respiratory diseases in the United States resulting in more than 84,000 deaths from bronchitis, emphysema, pneumonia, and chronic airway obstruction (COPD. Cigarette smoking directly causes over 90% of lung cancers; and secondhand smoke causes 3,000 lung cancer deaths annually in nonsmokers. One study estimates that 17% of lung cancer in nonsmokers results from exposure to tobacco smoke during their childhood years.

Gastrointestinal Diseases: Smoking is associated with an increased risk for GERD, gallstones stomach ulcers and cancer of the esophagus, stomach, pancreas, liver, and colon cancer.

Arthritis / **Bone Disease:** Smoking increases the risk for rheumatoid arthritis. Smokers have less bone mass than nonsmokers and the bone loss is more rapid in postmenopausal females who smoke.

Eye Disorders: Smoking increases the risk for cataracts and age-related macular degeneration.

Depression: Smokers are more likely to have depression and have more anxiety disorders, bulimia, attention-deficit disorders, alcohol abuse, and schizophrenia than non-smokers.

Specific Concerns for Women Who Smoke: The leading cancer killer in females is lung cancer. Since 1950, there has been a 600% increase in lung cancer deaths in smoking females. In 2015, 71,000 females will die from lung cancer. Women who smoke have an increased risk of infertility and spontaneous abortion. Complications caused by smoking during pregnancy include pre-term delivery, increased risk of stillbirth, lower birth weight, and decreased lung function in the developing child.

Oral Disease: Many oral diseases are directly linked to smoking and tobacco use. Please see PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET: Oral Changes Associated with Tobacco Use.

Bottom Line: The negative, harmful, addictive effects of tobacco products are clear. If you or a person that you care for smokes, please take action to stop. It can be done.

Benefits of Stopping Smoking

One of the many excuses for not stopping smoking is that the health damage has already been done and that the damage cannot be reversed. Please see PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET: Tobacco Use: Common Questions and Concerns. The following shows just how quickly you can benefit from stopping smoking:

After you smoke your last cigarette:

Within 20 minutes your blood pressure, heart rate, and body temperature will return to its normal values.
Within 24 hours your risk for having a heart attack begins to decrease.
Within 2 days your sense of smell and taste will begin to return. Food will taste and smell like it should.
Within 3 days your body is “free” of nicotine.
Within 3 weeks both your body and brain will no longer be dependent on nicotine.
Within 3 months your blood circulation and lung function has significantly improved.
Within one year you will have a large reduction in risk for both heart diseases and cancers.
Within 15 years your health risks are similar to those of a non-tobacco user.

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