

TOBACCO SMOKING - QUIT FOR LIFE

What is tobacco?

Tobacco is made from the dried leaves of the tobacco plant. Tobacco smoke is a mixture of almost 4,000 different chemical compounds, including nicotine, tar, carbon monoxide, acetone, ammonia and hydrogen cyanide. Forty-three of these chemicals have been proven to be carcinogenic (causing cancer).

Tobacco is ingested through smoking cigarettes, pipes and cigars. In the form of a fine powder, it may also be sniffed as snuff, or it is sometimes sold in blocks to be chewed. It can also be ingested through passive smoking. Cigarettes account for approximately 98% of tobacco consumed in Australia.

Nicotine

Nicotine is a poison. Swallowing a small amount of pure nicotine can kill an adult. Nicotine is the stimulant drug in tobacco smoke that causes dependency, as it is highly addictive, both physically and mentally. A key brain chemical involved in mediating the desire to consume drugs is the neurotransmitter dopamine, and research has shown that nicotine increases the levels of dopamine in the part of the brain that regulates feelings of pleasure. This is an important reason why nicotine is so addictive.

Many smokers believe smoking calms their nerves. However, smoking releases epinephrine, a hormone that creates physiological stress in the smoker, rather than relaxation. The addictive quality of the nicotine contained in the cigarette makes the user smoke more to calm down, when in fact the smoking itself is causing the agitation.

Tar

Tar is released when a cigarette burns. It is the main cause of lung and throat cancer in smokers, and it also aggravates bronchial and respiratory disease. A smoker who smokes one packet a day, inhales more than half a cup of tar from cigarettes each year.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is a colourless, odourless and very toxic gas, which is taken up more readily by the lungs than oxygen. High levels of carbon monoxide in the blood is typical of smokers and, together with nicotine, increases the risk of heart disease, hardening of the arteries and other circulatory problems.

What are the problems associated with tobacco smoking?

Tobacco smoking is the single largest preventable cause of death and illness in Australia, responsible for over 19,000 deaths each year, and many more disabilities.

The ill health effects associated with long-term tobacco smoking include lung disease, such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema; heart disease; stroke; cancer of the mouth, larynx, pharynx, oesophagus, lungs, pancreas, cervix, uterus and bladder; peripheral vascular disease due to decreased blood flow to the legs; and reduced fertility in both men and women.

One in two long-term smokers die from diseases caused by smoking. Half of these premature deaths occur in middle age, with an average loss of 23 years of life.



In 1998, the National Drug Strategy Household Survey showed that tobacco smoking remained the leading cause of drug-related hospital episodes in Australia, with 142,525 (71%) episodes in 1997–98. The main tobacco-related illnesses requiring hospitalisation were cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and ischaemic heart disease.

What are the benefits of quitting smoking?

Stopping smoking at any age gives immediate benefits for men and women of all ages. Quitting allows the body to repair itself. Some of the immediate benefits of quitting include:

- within one week of quitting nicotine and carbon monoxide leave the body's system, and the lungs begin to work more efficiently.
- taste buds come alive and sense of smell improves
- breath, hair, fingers, teeth and clothes look and smell cleaner
- within a month blood pressure returns to its normal level, and the immune system begins to show signs of recovery
- within three months, blood flow to the hands and feet improves
- after twelve months the risk of cancer and heart disease is reduced
- the incidence and progression of lung disease is reduced

How may quitting smoking affect the body?

A person who is dependent on cigarettes may find that they experience withdrawal symptoms when they cut down or stop smoking cigarettes. The short-term effects of quitting smoking may include:

- increased nervousness and tension
- agitation
- psychological symptoms, such as mood swings and lack of concentration
- changes to sleep patterns
- headaches
- coughs
- cravings

Research has shown that the majority of addicted smokers would like to quit smoking.

In 1998, the National Drug Household Survey reported that more than one in three (33%) smokers had unsuccessfully attempted to quit smoking, while a similar proportion (32%) had changed to a cigarette brand with a lower tar or nicotine content. Almost one in five (19%) smokers had successfully given up for more than one month during the previous year, while 43% had reduced their daily cigarette consumption.

Quitting smoking requires willpower and may take more than one attempt, as the chemical compounds in tobacco are highly addictive.

