

Health risks of smoking

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HEALTH RISKS OF SMOKING Cigarette smoking is one of the major threats to health identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its annual global health report. Despite increased public awareness and all the warnings about the dangers of smoking, not everyone gives it their full attention. This paper examines the health risks factors from smoking as described from research-based and health related studies and a variety of health-programs used to mitigate or reduce the risks.

Diseases associated with smoking

Heart disease

The American Heart Association (AHA) points to smoking as the number one cause of heart and blood vessel diseases. It is responsible for " more than 440, 000 of the more than 2. 4 million annual deaths." ¹ This way of conveying the quantitative risks shows the magnitude of health risks of smoking compared to other non-medical risks. AHA further analyzed the risk factors associated with cigarette smoking by the following findings:

increase the risk of heart attack by two to six times.

increase the risk of heart disease for a woman using the contraceptive pill.

increase the risk of stroke by three times

increase the risk of peripheral arterial disease, which can lead to gangrene, by more than five times.

Abnormal cholesterol levels

Abnormal level of cholesterol is considered a major risk factor of heart disease, which can be aggravated by smoking. Cholesterol, a fat-like substances, clogs up in the walls of the arteries and blocks flood flow to the heart, causing the hardening of arteries, and eventually heart attack.

Lung disease

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An assessment study reported by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) revealed that tobacco smoking is known to cause lung cancer in humans, responsible for an estimated " 434, 000 deaths per year in the United States." 2

Smoking is not only a risk factor in itself to the smoker but it can cause other risk factors to passive smokers. These are the nonsmokers who inhale secondhandsmoke. EPA has also reported that exposure to environmental tobacco smoke presents a serious and substantial public health risk. In adults, secondhandsmoke is a human lung carcinogen, responsible for approximately 3, 0000 lung cancer deaths annually in U. S. nonsmokers. In children, respiratory track infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia, and asthma.

Other risks caused by smoking

Impotence or risk of erectile dysfunction.

Macular degeneration, resulting in the gradual loss of eyesight and other eye problems.

Contributes to the development of peptic ulcer

Reduces the blood supply to the skin and lowers levels of Vitamin A.

Dementia

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD

Thyroid problems

Other types of cancer such as bladder cancer, cancer of the aesophagus, cancer of the kidneys, cancer of the pancreas and cervical cancer.

To reduce the health risk of smoking and help the smokers kick the habit, a number of health promotion strategies are adopted by health experts:

Behavior modification programmes. Achievement will depend on behavior

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change at every level, individual, families, communities, organizations and policymaking bodies.

Nicotine replacement treatment (NRT) in the form of gum, skin patches or nasal spray.

Zyban (bupropion) is a medicine that's licensed to help smoking cessation.

Alternative therapies such as acupuncture and hypnosis.

Set up smoking cessation programs and clinics.

Notes

1 American Health Association (AHA), "Cigarette Smoking and Cardiovascular Diseases,"; Internet site at <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4545>; accessed on Sept. 23, 2005

2 U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "Fact Sheet: Respiratory Health Effects of Passive Smoking,"; Internet site at <http://www.epa.gov/smokefree/pubs/etsfs-htm> ; Accessed on Sept. 23, 2005.

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