

Why do people smoke cigarettes



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For my whole life, I have never understood why people smoke cigarettes even when they know the horrible effects it has on one's health. It has been known for many years that the use of tobacco products is the main cause of life threatening diseases, such as cancer and emphysema. In the 20th century alone, smoking tobacco has accounted for over 100 million deaths, yet people continue to infest their body with this poisonous smoke.

I realize now that the reason I have negative feelings towards smoking is because my parents adversely portrayed the behavior of smoking to me when I was a child. This experience has led me to believe that the way parents react to smoking plays a big role on whether their child becomes a smoker or not. I also believe that social pressure, coming both from friends and the media, is another cause of experimenting with tobacco. My real question then becomes not just why people smoke, but why some people become regular smokers while others smoke occasionally, or quit altogether.

My analysis will focus on the behaviors at each stage of life that most frequently influence the initiation of smoking tobacco. Childhood Development From the moment children are born they are constantly exposed to the realities of everyday life. Children who are exposed to cigarette smoke at a young age, or whose parents smoke are more likely to begin smoking. (Evans) Therefore, it is imperative at this stage of development that parents condemn smoking as much as possible so as to scare their child from experimenting later in life.

In one study, the number of adolescent smokers was reduced, if by the time the child was 8 years old, their mother communicated to them strong antismoking attitudes. However, if either of the child's parents were

smokers, this anti-smoking attitude had no effect. (Forestell) Any perceived or witnessed pro-smoking behavior can increase a child's chances of experimenting because their perceptions of social and environmental norms are very sensitive at this point. (Lazarus) Adolescents

Children who witness other people smoking in a glorified manor begin to wonder what it is like to smoke. They create a positive social image (coolness, popularity, and having more friends) of smoking and acquire the desire to smoke in order to be like someone they know. (Evans) Advertisements and Hollywood movies have also shaped this image of smoking as being "cool". Many cigarette advertisements are specifically tailored to youth smokers and feature a stereotypical 'badass' smoker whom every male would die to be and every female would love to be with. Shadel) Not only are children easily influenced by peers, but their personality profile can determine if they are a typical smoker.

Extraversion is the trait that is most associated with smoking, and smokers tend to be sociable, impulsive, risk taking, and excitement seeking individuals. (Kassel) Regular Smokers vs. "Chippers" Although personality and social factors may make people likely to smoke, the actual habit is a function of operant conditioning. During the early stages, smoking provides pleasurable sensations and thus serves as a source of positive reinforcement. Kassel) However, at this stage some adolescents go on to be heavy smokers, while others smoke occasionally (chippers), or stop for good. The reason for this difference is that some people have high innate sensitivity to nicotine and, consequently, encounter aversive effects on initial use, thereby limiting further experimentation. (Pomerleu) After an individual

has smoked for many years, the avoidance of withdrawal symptoms and negative reinforcement become the key motivations.

Stress plays a huge part as well in the frequency of a child's exposure to smoke. Different things such as household dysfunction, parental divorce, and adverse childhood experiences play a role in smoke experimentation and in the progression from an experimental to regular smoker. Conclusion Each stage of life has an important role in distinguishing a smoker from a non-smoker. As I predicted earlier in this analysis, the first impressions a child develops about smoking depends on their home environment and the way their parents react to smoking.

Once the child moves into adolescents, his/her peers begin to play a much larger role than parents in actually experimenting with tobacco. I was very surprised to find that people have different sensitivities to nicotine, which is why some people stop after trying a few cigarettes. This finding clarifies for me why two similar people can have very different attitudes about smoking. Thus, whether an individual smokes is the result of initial sensitivity to nicotine, but the degree of dependence is determined by exposure.