

# Lung cancer isn't the only health risk for smokers



**Cigarettes can destroy your health—and the health of those around you—in many ways.**

## **Have you heard the worst thing about smoking? Probably not.**

Researchers are learning more about the devastating toll that smoking can take on the human body, including some of the following:<sup>1</sup>

- Tobacco smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals: hundreds are toxic and about 70 can cause cancer
- These poisonous chemicals reach every organ in your body
- They cause inflammation and damage to cells throughout the body
- They can disrupt your body's ability to heal
- Once tobacco has damaged cells, they can grow uncontrollably as cancer
- Smoking can cause cancer almost anywhere in the body: mouth, nose, throat, larynx, trachea, esophagus, lungs, stomach, pancreas, kidneys, bladder, cervix, bone marrow, and blood

## **Cancer isn't the only health danger**

It's truly frightening to see how many types of cancer can be caused by smoking. But cancer is just one of the health risks. Smoking can literally take your breath away.

Here's a partial list of respiratory and other diseases caused or complicated by smoking:<sup>1</sup>

- Causes chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), for which there is no cure. COPD includes lung diseases such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis. People with COPD can have a severely compromised quality of life, including dependence on supplemental oxygen to breathe. Smokers are 12 to 13 times more likely to die from COPD than nonsmokers.



- Increased risk of getting and dying from tuberculosis, an infection that usually attacks the lungs
- Increased risk of developing diabetes—30 to 40 percent higher for active smokers than non-smokers; smoking makes diabetes harder to control
- Higher risk for complications from diabetes, like heart and kidney disease, amputation, retinopathy (which leads to blindness), and nerve damage
- Changes to your blood chemistry (due to harmful substances in tobacco) that can lead to:
  - Aneurysms—bulging blood vessels that can burst and may kill you
  - Stroke—the sudden death of brain cells caused by blood clots or bleeding
  - Heart attacks and damage to your arteries

### You're not the only one at risk

You may believe that smoking is a personal choice and that only the smoker will suffer from its adverse effects. But we now know that smoking can put other people at tremendous risk.

Exposure to secondhand smoke has immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system and can cause coronary heart disease and stroke. It also interferes with the normal functioning of the heart, blood, and vascular systems in ways that increase the risk of having a heart attack.<sup>2</sup> Even brief exposures to secondhand smoke can damage the lining of blood vessels and cause your blood platelets to become stickier. These changes can cause a deadly heart attack.<sup>3</sup>

Children are also much more susceptible to secondhand smoke. About half of all the children between ages 3 and 18 years old in the United States are exposed to cigarette smoke regularly. Children exposed to second-hand smoke have more respiratory infections than children who are not exposed.<sup>2</sup>

Does a friend, family member, or co-worker have asthma? If so, then you know how frightening an asthma attack can be, watching someone struggling to breathe. Breathing in second-hand smoke can trigger an asthma attack in a nonsmoker, child, or adult.<sup>2</sup>

When you think about the health risks of smoking, keep in mind the smoker is not only at risk—so is everyone around them breathing in secondhand smoke.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Effects of Cigarette Smoking," accessed at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco), page last reviewed April 28, 2020

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Effects of Secondhand Smoke," January 2017

3. American Heart Association, "Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics – 2020 Update: A Report from the American Heart Association," *Circulation*. 2020;141:e139-e596

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