

THE HIGH COST OF SMOKING

By: Dr. John A. Papa, DC



More than 45,000 people will die prematurely this year in Canada due to tobacco use. At least 1,000 of them will be non-smokers. It is no mystery to most people that smoking is detrimental to human health. What some may not realize is that smoking also has an enormous and significant economical impact for individuals who choose to smoke, and on society as a whole. The purpose of this article is to seriously evaluate the negative impact of smoking in the hope of stimulating critical thought for smokers and those thinking of quitting.

Tobacco smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals, including 50 that cause, initiate, or promote cancer such as tar, ammonia, carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and benzopyrene. Up to half of all smokers will die from smoking before their 70th birthday, and only after years of suffering a reduced quality of life. There is very strong scientific evidence that smoking is related to more than two dozen diseases and conditions. The most notable of these diseases and conditions include those grouped into the cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory groups. Tobacco smoking causes an estimated 33% of all cancer deaths, 25% of all fatal heart attacks, and 85% of deaths from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Many other well known conditions have been linked to smoking as well, including osteoporosis, tooth decay, gum disease, infertility, chronic insomnia, and susceptibility to colds and flu. Non-smokers exposed to second hand smoke (SHS) also become at risk for developing the same conditions and diseases as smokers. The saddest statistic of all is that children regularly exposed to SHS are at least 50% more likely to suffer damage to their lungs and develop breathing problems such as asthma. Much like regular exercise has the ability to positively affect every organ and structure in your body, cigarette smoking, and SHS has the opposite ability to negatively affect every organ and structure in your body.

If the threat of cancer, cardiovascular or respiratory disease is not enough to convince an individual to quit smoking, maybe the prospect of high financial cost will. The financial consequences of lighting up extend far beyond the cost of a pack of cigarettes, which is estimated at \$2,500-\$3,000 per year for a pack-a-day smoker in Ontario. Smokers pay more for insurance and lose money on the resale value of their cars and homes. Bad breath, yellow teeth and smelly clothes are just a few of the personal side effects of smoking, and all cost money to correct. Smokers also spend extra money on dry cleaning, teeth cleaning, gum, mouthwash and mints. Using U.S. statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and applying them to Canada, the economic burden of smokers totals anywhere from \$15-\$20 billion per year in medical expenditures and lost productivity.

So why the insanity? A large part of this has to do with the fact that cigarettes are highly addictive. The warning label on a pack of cigarettes does not lie. Nicotine is an extremely addictive chemical found in cigarettes. Nicotine acts as a stimulant on the central nervous system, which results in adrenaline production, and an increase in blood pressure and heart rate. Nicotine also affects the overall metabolic rate, the regulation of body temperature, and the levels of certain hormones and brain chemicals. This cascade

of events creates a pleasurable sensation in the smoker, while ironically at the same time is seriously damaging their health. This pleasurable sensation is one of the factors that makes tobacco so addictive. Once you become addicted, your body depends on the presence of nicotine. If you then refrain from smoking, withdrawal symptoms occur, which include but are not limited to irritability, frustration, anger, anxiety, headache, increased appetite, stomach cramps, and an intense craving for nicotine.

Once the smoking habit has been acquired, it is difficult to break (all the more reason never to start!). Some experts believe that addiction to tobacco may be harder to overcome than addiction to heroin or cocaine. This is because smoking creates a strong physical and psychological dependency. It is usually easier to overcome the physical addiction than the psychological dependency. Although physical withdrawal can be unpleasant, it lasts for a short period of time, usually no more than several weeks. Long-term cravings are more likely a matter of psychological dependency, and require an ongoing commitment from the individual trying to quit.

It is never too late to try and quit smoking. Many of the negative health aspects of smoking start to reverse after a smoker quits. Sometimes the benefits of quitting begin in a matter of hours. Those looking for help in trying to quit should speak to a medical professional. There are also numerous valuable facts, aids and tools on the Health Canada, Canadian and American Lung Association websites. Smoking remains one of the most preventable causes of death. The bottom line is, butt out for better health!

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