

Tobacco – Simple Facts

What is in tobacco smoke?

Tobacco smoke is a complex mixture of hundreds of different compounds including solids (tar) and gases such as carbon monoxide and nicotine- a liquid which becomes a gas.

Nicotine

A typical cigarette contains 1-2mg of nicotine. The actual amount reaching the bloodstream varies according to the type of cigarette and how it is smoked. Nicotine is believed to be responsible for most of the immediate effects of smoking, many of the long-term effects and, to a large degree, for the habit-forming aspect of smoking.

Tar

Tar is the substance in the smoke left behind on a filter after all the nicotine and moisture have been extracted. Tar is known to be strongly associated with cancer and to aggravate respiratory disease.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon Monoxide reduces the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood and reduces oxygen supply to the tissues. It is a possible contributing factor in heart disease.

Immediate Effects

Smoking stimulates the central nervous system. Heart rate, breathing and blood pressure increase and the skin temperature drops. The blood vessels in the fingers and toes tighten, reducing blood supply to those areas. Inexperienced smokers may suffer diarrhoea and vomiting. Some smokers report that smoking produces relaxation.

Long Term Effects

Smoking is the single most important cause of lung cancer. It is also associated with cancers of the mouth and upper respiratory tract. Although the relationship is less strong, cigarette smoking is a contributory factor in the development of cancer of the bladder, kidney, pancreas, stomach and cervix. Smoking is now the most common cause of chronic respiratory disease, e.g. chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

The risks of coronary heart disease, stroke and impaired circulation of the legs and feet leading to gangrene are much greater for smokers than non-smokers. This is because they are more likely to suffer narrowing of the arteries supplying blood to the heart, brain and lower limbs. Smokers are more likely to develop peptic ulcers and their continued smoking interferes with the healing process.

Smoking may also be a factor in decreasing levels of vitamin C and some members of the vitamin B group in the body. Smokers may have less effective immune systems than non-smokers, which could decrease an individual's resistance to infection and cancer.

Tolerance and Dependence

Tolerance to and dependence on tobacco occurs with continued use. Tolerance occurs when the body becomes so used to the drug that more must be used to achieve the same effect. Tolerance to the effects of tobacco products- particularly the nicotine in tobacco- has been clearly demonstrated. Dependence occurs when the drug becomes so central to the user's thoughts that he feels he can't live without it. Indicators of dependence include a craving or compulsion to use tobacco and withdrawal symptoms if the use of tobacco stops.

Withdrawal symptoms seen in people who have recently stopped smoking include a drop in pulse rate and blood pressure, disturbed sleep, slower reactions and constipation. Intense craving for tobacco, tension, irritability, restlessness, depression and difficulty concentrating have also been reported by many ex-smokers.

Women and Tobacco

Women who smoke have smaller babies on average, increased risk of premature births and a greater occurrence of miscarriage and still-birth. Women smokers using oral contraceptives appear to be more likely to suffer heart and blood vessel diseases than non-smokers. Those over 30 years of age are especially at risk. Women smokers also tend to reach menopause at an earlier age.

Passive Smoking

There is evidence that a smoke-filled environment is bad for the health of non-smokers. The smoke can be extremely irritating and it may distress people with allergies, children and those who already have a heart or lung disease.

Research has shown that non-smoking wives of heavy smokers are more susceptible to smoking-related diseases, particularly lung cancer, than non-smoking wives of men who don't smoke.

Tobacco and the Law

In Queensland it is illegal to sell or give cigarettes and tobacco to persons under the age of 16 years. It is also illegal for a person under the age of 16 years to use tobacco in any form in a public place. Offenders are liable to fines.

Information is supplied by the APFDFY Maryborough Qld Australia Phone/Fax 0741 233 810