

Smoking

Smoking almost triples the risk of heart disease. It narrows blood vessels and expands blood clots, causing the cardiovascular equivalent of a traffic jam on the highway to your heart and brain. Reduce blood flow to the heart and you risk a heart attack. Reduce it to the brain and you risk a stroke.

Smoking causes heart disease by:

- Increasing blood pressure.
- Increasing blood clotting.
- Increasing carbon monoxide levels and reducing oxygen levels.

Passive smoking

Non-smokers who breathe second hand smoke suffer many of the diseases of active smoking. Second-hand smoke contains 5 times more carbon monoxide and 6 times more nicotine than first-hand smoking because the filter on a cigarette offers some protection for the smoker.

Second-hand smoke causes a wide variety of health problems in children including bronchitis and pneumonia, exacerbation of asthma, middle ear infections, and glue ear, the most common cause of deafness in children.

Smoking and the unborn baby

Babies born to mothers who smoked (or are exposed to second-hand smoke) while pregnant are more likely to be underweight, premature or stillborn. There is also an association with the risk of miscarriage and may even harm intellectual and behavioural development of the child.

The child has a greater risk of sudden infant death syndrome, breathing problems and developing lung disease or diabetes later in his/her life.

The harmful substances from smoking pass through breast milk, so with every cigarette smoked and any second-hand smoke inhaled, the baby is smoking. Smoking reduces milk volume so smoking mothers may produce too little milk, causing the child to gain less weight and grow less efficiently than babies of non-smokers.

Are low-tar, mild or low nicotine products better for my health?

There is no such thing as a safe cigarette. "Mild" doesn't necessarily mean less harmful - it may just refer to a milder taste. "Low" nicotine cigarettes may cause smokers to inhale more deeply or to smoke more cigarettes to get the nicotine their bodies crave.

What about pipe and cigar smoking?

These smokers tend to inhale less smoke than cigarette smokers; therefore their risk of heart disease is less. On the other hand, they have an increased risk of developing mouth and tongue cancer.

What about smokeless tobacco?

Snuff and Snus are examples of tobacco products that are not inhaled. These products do however contain nicotine and are addictive, which is harmful to the body.

Marijuana - good or bad for the heart?

The risk of a heart attack increases five times within an hour of smoking marijuana because of an increased heart rate and the changes in blood pressure that occur.

There is no safe level of smoking. The most important step for smokers is to quit.

How do I quit?

- 8 out of 10 people find it most effective to stop smoking abruptly.
- At those times when you usually smoke, plan a constructive substitute activity.
- Stay motivated - the first few days are the toughest.
- Avoid other smokers and smoke filled environments.
- Find support. Refer to a smoke quitting association or support group.
- Consider using medical quitting-aids such as nicotine patches, sprays and gums.

It's never too late to benefit from quitting.

Some harmful effects are reversible:

- **Within 8 hours** of quitting, blood oxygen and carbon monoxide levels normalise.
- **Within 24 hours** the risk of a heart attack or stroke starts to decrease.
- **Within 48 hours** nerve endings and the sense of taste and smell start to recover.

- **Within 72 hours** lung capacity improves and coughing decreases.
- **Within days** blood clotting improves
- **After 3 weeks** exercising becomes easier.
- **Within 1-3 months** blood circulation as well as sperm count in men improves.
- **After 2 months** you feel more energetic.
- **Within 5 years** the risk of developing lung cancer is halved.
- **Within 5-15 years** the risk of heart disease is the same as a non-smoker.

This is one in a series of brochures. For the full series and more heart smart information call the Heart Mark Diet Line on 0860 223 222 or visit www.heartfoundation.co.za.

