



**CONNECTICUT
Clearinghouse**

a program of the Connecticut Center
for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery

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A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Effects of Smoking on Your Health

The effects of smoking are serious. It can harm nearly every organ of the body. It causes nearly one of every five deaths in the United States each year.

Is smoking a risk factor for autoimmune diseases?

The immune system is the body's way of protecting itself from infection and disease. Smoking compromises the immune system, making smokers more likely to have respiratory infections.

Smoking also causes several autoimmune diseases, including Crohn's disease and rheumatoid arthritis. It may also play a role in periodic flare-ups of signs and symptoms of autoimmune diseases. Smoking doubles your risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis.

Smoking has recently been linked to type 2 diabetes, also known as adult-onset diabetes. Smokers are 30% to 40% more likely to develop type 2 diabetes than nonsmokers. Additionally, the more cigarettes an individual smokes, the higher the risk for diabetes.

How does smoking affect my bones?

Recent studies show a direct relationship between tobacco use and decreased bone density. Smoking is one of many factors—including weight, alcohol consumption, and activity level—that increase your risk for osteoporosis, a condition in which bones weaken and become more likely to fracture.

Significant bone loss has been found in older women and men who smoke. Quitting smoking appears to reduce the risk for low bone mass and fractures. However, it may take several years to lower a former smoker's risk.

In addition, smoking from an early age puts women at even higher risk for osteoporosis. Smoking lowers the level of the hormone estrogen in your body, which can cause you to go through menopause earlier, boosting your risk for osteoporosis.

How does smoking affect my heart and blood vessels?

The chemicals in tobacco smoke harm your blood cells and damage the function of your heart. This damage increases your risk for:

- Atherosclerosis, a disease in which a waxy substance called plaque builds up in your arteries
- Aneurysms, which are bulging blood vessels that can burst and cause death
- Cardiovascular disease (CVD), which includes:
 - Coronary heart disease (CHD), narrow or blocked arteries around the heart
 - Heart attack and damage to your arteries
 - Heart-related chest pain
 - High blood pressure
- Coronary Heart disease, where platelets—components in the blood—stick together along with proteins to form clots which can then get stuck in the plaque in the walls of arteries and cause heart attacks
- Peripheral arterial disease (PAD), a condition in which plaque builds up in the arteries that carry blood to the head, organs, and limbs
- Stroke, which is sudden death of brain cells caused by blood clots or bleeding

Breathing tobacco smoke can even change your blood chemistry and damage your blood vessels. As you inhale smoke, cells that line your body's blood vessels react to its chemicals. Your heart rate and blood pressure go up and your blood vessels thicken and narrow.

How does smoking affect my lungs and breathing?

Every cigarette you smoke damages your breathing and scars your lungs. Smoking causes:

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a disease that gets worse over time and causes wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, and other symptoms

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- Emphysema, a condition in which the walls between the air sacs in your lungs lose their ability to stretch and shrink back. Your lung tissue is destroyed, making it difficult or impossible to breathe
- Chronic bronchitis, which causes swelling of the lining of your bronchial tubes. When this happens, less air flows to and from your lungs
- Pneumonia
- Asthma
- Tuberculosis

People with asthma can suffer severe attacks when around cigarette smoke.

Can smoking affect my vision?

Smoking is as bad for your eyes as it is for the rest of your body. Research has linked smoking to an increased risk of developing age-related macular degeneration, cataract, and optic nerve damage, all of which can lead to blindness.

Do cigarettes cause cancer?

Tobacco smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals. About 70 of them are known to cause cancer. Smoking cigarettes is the number-one risk factor for lung cancer. But, smoking can affect your entire body, and is known to cause cancer in the:

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| • Lungs | • Stomach |
| • Trachea | • Bladder |
| • Bronchus | • Pancreas |
| • Esophagus | • Kidney |
| • Oral Cavity | • Liver |
| • Lip | • Uterine Cervix |
| • Nasopharynx | • Colon |
| • Nasal Cavity | • Rectum |
| • Larynx | |

In addition, smoking is known to cause leukemia.

Do light cigarettes cause cancer?

There is no such thing as a safe cigarette. People who smoke any kind of cigarette are at an increased risk for smoking-related diseases. Although it is no longer legal to sell light cigarettes, people who smoked light cigarettes in the past are likely to have inhaled the same amount of toxic chemicals as those who smoked regular cigarettes. They remain at high risk of developing smoking-related cancers and other diseases.

Do menthol cigarettes cause cancer?

All cigarettes are harmful, including menthol cigarettes. Many smokers think menthol cigarettes are less harmful, but there is no evidence that menthol cigarettes are safer than other cigarettes. Like other cigarettes, menthol cigarettes harm nearly every organ in the body and cause many diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and respiratory diseases. Menthol cigarettes, like other cigarettes, also negatively impact male and female fertility and are harmful to pregnant women and their unborn babies.

Some research shows that menthol cigarettes may be more addictive than non-menthol cigarettes. More research is needed to understand how addiction differs between menthol and non-menthol cigarette use.

Can smoking cigars and pipes cause cancer?

Cigar and pipe smoke, like cigarette smoke, contains toxic and cancer-causing chemicals that are harmful to both smokers and non-smokers. Cigar and pipe smoking causes:

- Bladder cancer
- Esophageal cancer
- Laryngeal (voice box) cancer
- Lip cancer
- Lung cancer
- Mouth cancer
- Throat cancer
- Tongue cancer

If you smoke cigars daily, you are at increased risk for developing heart disease and lung diseases such as emphysema.

Department of Health and Human Services

BeTobaccoFree.gov

<http://betobaccofree.hhs.gov/health-effects/smoking-health/index.html>