

How does cigarette smoking increase your risk of getting cancer?

Most people know that smoking results in an elevated risk of lung cancer. In fact, smoking causes 87 percent of all lung cancer deaths. However, smoking is also closely linked to such lesser-known cancers as cancer of the mouth and oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, and bladder, all of which may be deadly. Smoking also plays a significant role in the development of kidney, stomach, breast, cervical, and pancreatic cancer. In fact, it is hard to find any type of cancer that is not influenced by smoking.

In what other ways does smoking affect your health?

Because the harmful substances found in cigarette smoke infiltrate most of the cells in your body, smoking can damage almost any organ. Respiratory diseases, lung infections (such as pneumonia), heart attacks, and strokes are common among smokers. A smoker's lifetime risk of having one of these illnesses increases with the number of years the individual has smoked, the age the individual began smoking, and the number of cigarettes smoked. Even the frequency of puffs and amount of smoke inhaled makes a difference. Smokers may also experience a loss of their senses of taste and smell, a decrease in energy, and a decline in overall wellbeing. Smoking during pregnancy often results in low birth weight of the fetus and premature delivery.

What kinds of carcinogens and harmful substances are found in cigarette smoke?

80 carcinogens are found in cigarette smoke, along with other toxic compounds, including the following:

- lead
- arsenic (used in rat poison)
- tar
- acetone (found in nail polish remover)
- ammonia (found in toilet and window cleaner)
- benzene (found in gasoline)
- formaldehyde (used to embalm bodies)
- carbon monoxide (found in automobile exhaust)

In total, a staggering 4000 different chemicals are found in cigarette smoke. Cigarettes also contain nicotine, an addictive drug that makes it difficult for people to quit smoking. This addiction is as powerful as that caused by cocaine and heroin.

CHAPTER 18	FAQ—Tobacco and Health	BLM 18.3.5
HANDOUT		

What health risks are caused by exposure to second-hand smoke?

In addition to increasing an individual's risk of developing cancer, second-hand smoke inhalation can also increase the risk of heart and respiratory disease in a non-smoker. Respiratory diseases are especially problematic in young children. Over 1000 Canadians die each year from second-hand smoke related diseases. Other effects of second-hand smoke include nausea, eye irritation, dizziness, coughing, headaches, asthma, and a weakened immune system.

If you quit smoking, how does this affect your risk of developing cancer and other health problems?

An individual will feel some of the benefits of no longer smoking almost immediately. Circulation improves within eight hours, and the blood is able to carry more oxygen as the level of carbon monoxide falls. After two days, senses of smell and taste return. After a few weeks, breathing becomes less impaired and elevated blood pressure returns to normal. In general, the younger an individual is when he or she stops smoking, the lower the chance that a smoking-related illness will develop. After only one non-smoking year, the risk of smoking-related heart attack falls by one half. Further, studies have shown that smokers who quit before the age of 50 will have only half the risk of dying in the next 15 years when compared to the risk of continuing smokers. After 10 to 15 non-smoking years, the premature death rate of a previous smoker become close to that of a person who never smoked.