

Smoking – To What Cost?

We have heard for years about the risks of smoking and nicotine. These risks include COPD and emphysema, lung, esophageal and mouth cancers, but are those all the risks? There are many other serious risks associated with smoking. Measure out the costs to continue smoking. How much are you willing to pay?

Effects on Female Infertility, Pregnancy and Childbirth

Studies have linked cigarette smoking to infertility in women, and to health problems in their babies. These negative effects include:

- Greater risk for infertility. Women who smoke one or more packs a day and who started smoking before age 18 are at greatest risk for fertility problems.
- Earlier menopause. Women who smoke tend to start menopause at an earlier age than non-smokers, perhaps because toxins in cigarette smoke damage eggs.
- Pregnancy complications, which increase with the number of cigarettes smoked.

Pregnancy complications that are more common in smokers include:

- Miscarriage
- Stillbirth
- Premature rupture of membranes
- Premature delivery
- Problems with the placenta

Smoking further increases the risk to the mother and unborn child in high-risk pregnancies.

Smoking during pregnancy increases the risk for:

- Low birth weight
- Birth defects (women who smoke during pregnancy have lower levels of folate, a B vitamin that is important for preventing birth defects)
- Obesity and diabetes
- Cleft lip (a split lip that has not closed during the fetus' development)

Some women have genes that may make them likely to deliver low-birth-weight infants if they smoke, although newborns of all female smokers are at greater risk for low birth weight. The good news is that women who stop smoking before becoming pregnant or during their first trimester of pregnancy reduce their risk of having a low-birth-weight baby compared to that of women who never smoked. Women who want to become pregnant should make every attempt to stop smoking, and they should use smoking cessation aids before they try to conceive. Government guidelines recommend that doctors ask all of their pregnant patients about their tobacco use, and offer counseling to those patients who do smoke. After birth, if new mothers cannot quit, they should at least be sure not to smoke in the same room as their infant. Pregnant women also need to avoid being around people who are smoking. Women who are exposed to secondhand smoke during pregnancy are 23% more likely to have a stillborn baby and 14% more likely to have a baby with a birth defect than women who are not exposed to secondhand smoke.



Effects on Male Fertility and Erectile Dysfunction

Smoking can harm a man's sexuality and fertility. Heavy smoking contributes to erectile dysfunction by decreasing the amount of blood flowing into the penis.

Smoking impairs sperm motility, reduces sperm lifespan, and may cause genetic changes that can affect a man's offspring. Men who smoke have less success with fertility treatments. They also have a lower sex drive and less frequent sex.

Quitting Smoking

It's never too late to quit smoking. According to the American Cancer Society, about half of all smokers who keep smoking will die from a smoking-related disease. Quitting has immediate health benefits.

Better Health after Quitting Smoking

Time After Last Cigarette	Physical Response
20 minutes	Blood pressure and pulse rates return to normal.
8 hours	Levels of carbon monoxide and oxygen in the blood return to normal
24 hours	Chance of a heart attack begins to decrease.
48 hours	Nerve endings start to regroup. Ability to taste and smell increases
72 hours	Bronchial tubes relax and the lungs can fill with more air.
2 weeks - 3 months	Circulation improves and lung function increases by up to 30%.
1 - 9 months	Rates of coughing, sinus infection, fatigue, and shortness of breath decrease. Cilia in the airways re-grow improving the ability to clear mucus and clean lungs. This reduces the chance of infection and increases energy level.
Long-Term Effects	After a year, the risk of dying from a heart attack or stroke is reduced by up to 50%.