Smoking and Your Health Meeting Kit

Smoking and your health safety talk

No matter how you smoke it, tobacco is dangerous to your health. There are no safe substances in any tobacco products, from acetone and tar to nicotine and carbon monoxide.

CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM

One of the ingredients in tobacco is a mood-altering drug called nicotine. Nicotine reaches your brain in mere seconds and makes you feel more energized for a while. But as that effect wears off, you feel tired and crave more. Nicotine is extremely habit-forming.

Physical withdrawal from nicotine can impair your cognitive functioning and make you feel anxious, irritated, and depressed. Withdrawal can also cause headaches and sleep problems.

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

When you inhale smoke, you’re taking in substances that can damage your lungs. Along with increased infections, people who smoke are at higher risk for chronic no reversible lung conditions.

CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM

Smoking damages your entire cardiovascular system. Nicotine causes blood vessels to tighten, which restricts the flow of blood. Over time, the ongoing narrowing, along with damage to the blood vessels, can cause peripheral artery disease.

Smoking also raises blood pressure, weakens blood vessel walls, and increases blood clots. Together, this raises your risk of stroke.

You’re also at an increased risk of worsening heart disease if you’ve already had heart bypass surgery, a heart attack, or a

stent placed in a blood vessel.

Smoking not only impacts your cardiovascular health, but also the health of those around you who don't smoke. Exposure to second-hand smoke carries the same risk to a non-smoker as someone who does smoke. Risks include stroke, heart attack, and heart disease.

COPD, which is one of the leading causes of death in the United States, includes both chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Most people with COPD have both of these conditions, but the severity of each of them varies from person to person.

In **COPD,** damage to the small airways in the lungs makes it hard for the lungs to get oxygen to the rest of the body.

Smoking is by far the most common cause of **COPD**. The risk goes up the more you smoke and the longer you smoke.

Some of the early signs and symptoms of **COPD** can include noises in the chest (such as wheezing, rattling, or whistling), shortness of breath when active, and coughing up mucus (phlegm). Over time, COPD can make it hard to breathe at rest as well, sometimes even when a person is getting oxygen through a mask or nasal tube.

COPD tends to get worse over time, especially if a person continues to smoke. There is no cure for **COPD**, although some medicines might help with symptoms.

CHRONIC BRONCHITIS is a common problem in people who smoke for a long time. In this disease, the airways make too much mucus, forcing the person to try to cough it out. The airways become inflamed (swollen), and the cough becomes chronic (long-lasting). The symptoms can get better at times, but the cough keeps coming back. Over time, the airways can get blocked by scar tissue and mucus, which can lead to bad lung infections (pneumonia).

There's no cure for chronic bronchitis, but quitting smoking can help keep symptoms under control and help keep the damage from getting worse.

EMPHYSEMA, the walls between the tiny air sacs in the lungs break

down, which creates larger but fewer sacs. This lowers the amount of oxygen reaching the blood. Over time, these sacs can break down to the point where a person with emphysema might struggle to get enough air, even when at rest.

People with emphysema are at risk for many other problems linked to weak lung function, including pneumonia. In later stages of the disease, patients often need an oxygen mask or tube to help them breathe.

Emphysema cannot be cured, but it can be treated and slowed down if the person stops smoking.

CANCER

Smoking causes about 20% of all cancers and about 30% of all cancer deaths in the United States.

About 80% of lung cancers, as well as about 80% of all lung cancer deaths, are due to smoking. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in both men and women.

Smoking also increases the risk for cancers of the:Mouth

- Larynx (voice box)
- Pharynx (throat)
- Esophagus
- Kidney
- Cervix
- Liver
- Bladder
- Pancreas
- Stomach
- Colon/rectum

QUITTING

Quitting smoking is the one of the single best things you can do to greatly improve your overall health. Only a few hours of not smoking your heart rate and blood pressure decrease close to a normal level. Your blood circulation will also improve. After

about a year of quitting smoking your chances of heart disease decreases by half.

OVERALL HEALTH AND LIFE SPAN

- Smokers take more sick days. They also have higher health care costs.
- Insurers can charge tobacco users up to 50% more than people who don’t use tobacco.
- Smoking can cut at least 10 years off your expected lifespan.
- Smoking is the leading cause of premature, preventable death.

FINAL WORD

Smoking increases the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke by two to four times. People who smoke fewer than five cigarettes a day can have early signs of cardiovascular disease.