

Smoking and disease

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Risk of disease & death

Smoking is the primary cause of preventable illness and death. Every year smoking causes around 100,000 deaths in the UK.

Smokers under the age of 40 have a five times greater risk of a heart attack than non-smokers

Smoking causes around 80% of deaths from lung cancer, around 80% of deaths from bronchitis and emphysema, and about 14% of deaths from heart disease.

More than one quarter of all cancer deaths can be attributed to smoking. These include cancer of the lung, mouth, lip, throat, bladder, kidney, pancreas, stomach, liver and cervix.

About a half of all life-long smokers will die prematurely.

On average, cigarette smokers die 10 years younger than non-smokers.

Other health problems linked to smoking

On average women smokers go through the menopause up to 2 years earlier than non-smokers and are at a greater risk of developing osteoporosis.

Smoking has been associated with increased sperm abnormalities and is a cause of impotence.

It can affect both your sense of taste and smell. Smokers are more likely to develop facial wrinkles at a younger age and have dental hygiene problems.

Teenage smokers experience more asthma and respiratory symptoms, suffer poorer health, have more school absences and are less fit.

Benefits of stopping smoking

Stopping smoking reduces the risk of developing many fatal diseases.

One year after stopping, the risk of a heart attack falls to about half that of a smoker. Within 15 years the risk falls to a level similar to that of a person who has never smoked.

If smokers quit before the age of 30 they can avoid almost all of the risk of lung cancer attributable to smoking.

Secondhand smoke

Exposure to other people's tobacco smoke is also a cause of ill-health. Secondhand smoke has been shown to cause:

- lung cancer and heart disease in adult non-smokers;
- increased sensitivity and reduced lung function in people with asthma;
- irritation of the eye, nose and throat;
- reduced lung function in adults with no chronic chest problems.

Secondhand smoke exposure also harms babies and children, with an increased risk of respiratory infections, increased severity of asthma symptoms, more frequent occurrence of chronic coughs, phlegm and wheezing, and increased risk of cot death and glue ear.

It is estimated that globally 600,000 deaths a year are caused by secondhand smoke. Most of these deaths are among women and children.