



LIGHTING UP: MAYBE NOT SO BRIGHT!

It has been 50 years since the famous Surgeon General's report brought the hazards of smoking to the public attention.

Since then we have made a lot of progress but there is more to do. There are over 7000 chemicals in cigarette smoke. As little as five cigarettes a day can result in cardiovascular disease. Second hand smoke increases stroke risk by 20-30%. One in every three cancer deaths is linked to smoking. On average smokers are sick more often, admitted to hospital more often, miss work more often and die 10 years before nonsmokers.

Smoking causes blood vessels to get inflamed and plaques to build up. This results in an increased risk for coronary artery disease, stroke, peripheral vascular disease and abdominal aortic aneurysms. Smoking causes cancer in various organs through the chemicals which damage the body's DNA and create mutated cells that become cancerous. Smoking weakens the immune system and increases the risk of infection, diabetes, gum disease, arthritis and macular degeneration of the eyes. Smoking in men increases erectile dysfunction and in women causes more ectopic pregnancies, congenital malformations and placental injury that puts mother and child at great risk.

The good news is that stopping smoking can bring benefits very quickly. Within one year the risk, of heart attacks decreases significantly; in five years the risk for stroke is about that of a person who has never smoked. In five years, cancer risk for the mouth, throat esophagus and bladder is cut in half and the same is true for lung cancer at 10 years. Smoke free policies have reduced heart attack rates in communities.

While smoking is decreasing in North America the rate for women smokers has not declined as much. Nicotine in tobacco raises blood pressure and heart rate. It is highly addictive, making attempts to stop smoking difficult and associated with withdrawal symptoms. Many approaches to smoking cessation are available. Nicotine replacement is one option. Available as a skin patch, chewing gum or as electronic cigarettes they are all useful options when used to wean the body's need for nicotine. While electronic cigarettes are clearly safer than cigarettes, long term use still poses health risks. Regular cigar smoking and chewing tobacco also pose cancer and heart disease risk.

Drug therapy have also been shown to be effective in reducing the craving for cigarettes.

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Bupropion and varenicline are prescription medicines. They should be used only under the guidance of a physician in light of potential side effects.

Non-pharmacological approaches include hypnotherapy, acupuncture, and cognitive behaviour therapy consisting of various counselling sessions can all be useful. Support groups, peer pressure and hospitalization events increase the likelihood of smoking cessation. Relapses are common and expected. It should not prevent a smoker from trying again. Family and friends should not smoke around someone who is trying to quit. Weight gain often occurs with smoking cessation. Proactive measures such as chewing sugarless gum, exercise programs and dietary advice can reduce the risk.

Multiple resources exist to help you stop smoking. 1-800-QUIT-NOW. www.smokefree.gov, www.cdc.gov/tips and locally <https://dph.georgia.gov/ready-quit>. We encourage you to make the first attempt...it may not be your last ...but its one step closer to a healthier you and a healthier America! ■



Narendra Singh, MD, FRCP(C), FACC, FAHA is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University, and the Director of Clinical Research, Atlanta Heart Specialists LLC, Atlanta, GA. Dr. Singh may be reached at 678-679-6800 or DrSingh@ahsmed.com. www.heartdrsingh.com.