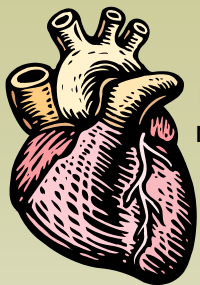


## Health Effects: Heart Disease

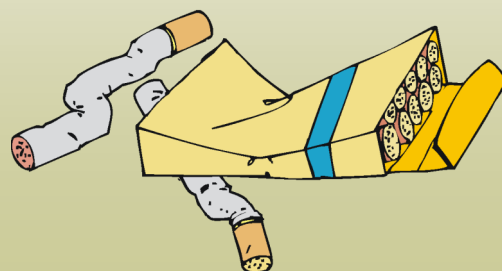


Most of us are born with a healthy heart. Throughout the lifetime, it will beat millions of times, steadily pumping blood-borne nutrients and oxygen to every cell of the body. The subconscious awareness of our own heartbeat often alerts us to changes in emotional or physical well-being. The heart does respond to those changes, speeding up with exercise, excitement or stress, and occasionally palpitating with fear or strong emotion. It also slows down with rest, relaxation, contentment, and sleep. Perhaps because of this, the heart is popularly associated with emotion and the ability to feel and demonstrate love, although these emotions actually occur in the mind. Over the lifespan, that strong heart muscle works tirelessly and relentlessly, but it ages as we age. Our doctors constantly warn us of overburdening the heart's work by being overweight, not exercising properly, not eating properly, and of course abusing drugs or alcohol. Tobacco use, although legal, is a drug addiction that seriously abuses the heart. Tobacco in any form—smoked, chewed, dipped—can cause serious heart disease.

### How Tobacco Affects the Heart

Tobacco (and the more than 4,000 toxic chemicals in tobacco) attacks the heart in several ways.

- Decreases tolerance to physical activity, depriving the cardiovascular system of aerobic exercise.
- Interferes with the oxygen content of blood by replacing it with carbon monoxide and other deadly gases.
- Decreases HDL (good) cholesterol levels and is linked to higher levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol. The ratio between these two increases, which is more dangerous than an overall high cholesterol level.
- Increases blood pressure.
- Thickens blood and increases the risk blood clots, which will obstruct blood flow and cause heart attacks or strokes.
- Can cause atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries. This condition develops from inflammation of artery walls and the deposit of fatty plaques. Eventually, the artery walls are scarred and thickened, seriously reducing blood flow. Coronary heart disease is the result.
- May contribute to congestive heart failure by causing coronary heart disease.
- Contributes in aneurysm formation in major blood vessels such as the abdominal aorta.
- Is a major factor in sudden death due to cardiac arrest in both men and women.
- Causes heart disease and death for non-users through secondhand smoke. It is estimated that as many as 70,000 deaths a year in the United States are due to heart and blood vessel disease caused by secondhand smoke.



## Health Effects: Heart Disease, cont.

### Good News and Bad News

The bad news is that tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of disease worldwide. Thirty percent of heart disease in this country is linked to tobacco use and is a more serious health problem than tobacco-related lung disease. The risk of developing heart disease is two to four times higher for tobacco users than non-users. Tobacco-related heart disease increases with age; users over 50 are high risk for heart attack and stroke.

The good news is that stopping tobacco use gives the heart a chance to heal. The risk of stroke or heart disease decreases steadily after stopping tobacco use. For light smokers, the effects on the cardiovascular system can reverse in just three years. Depending on the daily amount of tobacco use and the years of use, former users may have the same risk patterns as non-users in five to fifteen years. For those who are already suffering from heart disease, stopping tobacco use can slow disease progression. Heart attack sufferers who quit tobacco use can cut the risk of another heart attack by half.

The key is to get serious about quitting. Understanding the nature of the addiction is the first step. Overcoming that addiction will take time, energy, the support of loved ones, and a lot of willpower. Seventy percent of tobacco users want to quit; only 44% are successful each year. Finding a tobacco cessation program and sticking to it is critical. Your physician or counselor can advise you but keep in mind that most health insurance plans do not cover nicotine withdrawal. There are also many good tobacco cessation programs online. A good place to start is the South Dakota QuitLine. The toll free number is 1-866-SD QUIT (1-866-737-8487). The South Dakota QuitLine can help with information, coaching, discounts on nicotine withdrawal products, and free professional advice.



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For more information on tobacco and heart disease, please visit:  
[http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/sgr\\_2004/highlights/3.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2004/highlights/3.htm)  
<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4545>  
<http://thescoopsmoking.org>