

Tobacco and Other Cancers

All tobacco users are at high risk for cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, larynx and pharynx. Smokers (cigarettes, pipes, and cigars) also are high risk for lung cancer. About 87% of all lung cancers are directly linked to smoking. Everyone knows those statistics. However, tobacco users are also at high risk for other forms of cancer because tobacco in any form contains nicotine plus thousands of toxic chemicals. Many of these are cancer-causing agents, also known as carcinogens. Nicotine and all the other toxic chemicals enter the bloodstream through the lungs and the moist tissues of the mouth and can eventually travel everywhere in the body.

Where Do Those Toxic Chemicals Go?

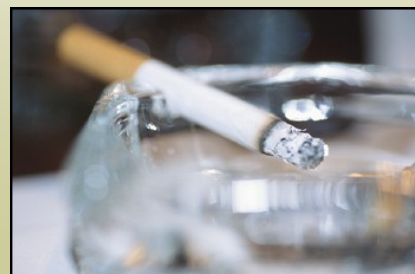
Those toxins go everywhere, right down to the toenails! Recent studies indicate that tobacco-related carcinogen exposure can be determined by measuring tobacco-related chemicals deposited in toenails. Nicotine, the primary addictive agent of tobacco, converts into cotinine in the human body, and cotinine is present in the toenails of tobacco users and of people exposed to tobacco through secondhand smoke. NNK, another carcinogen found in tobacco, is also detected in the toenails of tobacco users and those exposed to secondhand smoke. Between the point of entry (the mouth) and the toenails are a lot of vulnerable organs.

What Are the Cancer Risks for Tobacco Users and Those Exposed to Tobacco Smoke?

In addition to lung and oral cancer, medical studies indicate that tobacco users are at high risk for cancers of the nasal cavities, esophagus, kidney, bladder, pancreas, blood and bone marrow (leukemia), uterus, and cervix. Recent research even indicates strong links between smoking and skin cancer, especially around the mouth and neck. Similar risks also exist for nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke. These include the children, friends, and family members of smokers who use the same living spaces or travel in the same vehicles as smokers.

What Is Cancer?

The American Cancer Society defines cancer as a group of diseases characterized by the uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. Abnormal cancerous cells cannot carry on their normal functions, and they serve no useful purpose in the body. Cancer cells reproduce uncontrollably; cell division is haphazard. The cancer cells pile up in non-structured masses, which can spread to other organs of the body. Although cancer is often referred to as a single condition, it actually consists of more than 100 different diseases, depending on where the cancer originated. For instance, breast cancer cells that have spread to other organs, such as the lungs, can still be identified as breast cells in their new location. Cancer, if not treated, results in death. Treatments for cancer are radical and expensive: chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and/or surgery.



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How High Are the Cancer Risks?

- Tobacco is responsible for more than 30% of all cancer diagnoses. Only half of these cancers are lung, bronchial, or oral cancers. The remaining diagnoses of tobacco-related cancer are located in other body organs.
- Tobacco use accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths and 87% of lung cancer deaths.
- According to figures released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2008, tobacco use caused 2.4 million cases of cancer in the United States from 1999 to 2004. This includes tobacco users and people exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Nonsmokers have a 20-30% greater chance of developing tobacco-related cancer if they are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or work.

Medical professionals are aware of the high cancer risks for tobacco users and those exposed to secondhand smoke. So, tobacco users need to be honest about tobacco use when consulting physicians or dentists, and family members of smokers should also report secondhand smoke in their environment to their medical professionals.

Tobacco users, be prepared for strong medical advice on quitting tobacco use. Most health insurance programs will not cover smoking cessation but your doctor or dentist can advise on nicotine withdrawal programs and products. Most states have smoking cessation programs. In South Dakota, the program is the free South Dakota QuitLine. The toll free number is 1-866-SD QUIT (1-866-737-8487). Nicotine is a serious addiction, so you need all the help you can get. The South Dakota QuitLine can help with information, coaching, discounts on nicotine withdrawal products, and free professional advice.

For more information on tobacco and cancer risks, please visit:

<http://www.cancer.umn.edu/cancerinfo/prevention-smoking.html>

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/smoking>

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_2x_Tobacco-Related_Cancers_Fact_Sheet.asp?sitearea=PED