

Your Heart and Smoking



Most people know that cigarette smoking causes breathing problems and lung cancer. But did you know that smoking can lead to heart disease?

Smoking is a major cause of heart disease. In fact, smoking is to blame for 1 in 5 deaths in the United States.

Smoking kills more people before their time than anything else in the United States, and many of those deaths are from heart disease. Heart disease can cause heart attacks.

Smokers are more likely to get heart disease than people who don't smoke. And if you have any of the risk factors below, smoking can further increase your chance of getting heart disease.

5 risk factors

- High cholesterol (cole-es-ter-all) – a waxy film that can build up in your arteries and clog your blood flow to the heart
- Diabetes (die-uh-bee-teez) – when too much sugar stays in the blood
- High blood pressure
- Not being active
- Being overweight

How does smoking lead to heart disease? It:

- Reduces oxygen to the heart
- Makes blood pressure and heart rate higher
- Increases blood clots
- Damages the cells that line the arteries and other blood vessels (the tubes that carry blood through the body)

When you smoke, your blood pressure rises, you can't exercise as long, and your blood tends to become thicker. That means your blood has trouble carrying oxygen (ox-i-jen, part of the air we breathe) to your heart. And your heart needs lots of oxygen.

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If you are under 50 years old, smoking may be the biggest reason you'll get heart disease.

Also, women who smoke and take birth control medicine are far more likely to get heart disease than those who don't smoke and take the same drugs.

And if your mom or dad had heart disease, your chance of having heart disease goes up even more.

Smoking also reduces HDL, or "good" cholesterol, which helps free some of the LDL, or "bad" cholesterol, from the walls of your arteries so that your blood can flow better.

What about cigar and pipe smoking?

People who smoke cigars or pipes have a higher risk of heart disease than people who don't smoke.

So what about second-hand smoke?

Each year, about 37,000 to 40,000 people die from heart and blood vessel disease because of *other people's* smoke. Of these, about 35,000 people who don't smoke die from heart disease, including heart attacks.

The more you smoke, the more likely it is that you will have a heart attack. And the longer you smoke, the more your risk will grow.

Talk to your doctor to learn the best way for you to quit smoking and improve the health of your heart.

