

When women smoke

Written by Administrator

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We know smoking is dangerous, but for women, there are also other health risks due to physiological and lifestyle differences, which puts women in a more dangerous position.

A CAR pulled up next to me as I was waiting at the traffic light last week. A slim hand reached out from the car window, a cigarette dangling from the fingers. When I looked over, I saw that the driver was a young woman, maybe in her early 20s.

More and more women, especially teenage girls, are picking up the filthy habit of smoking. This is despite decades of medical and public health campaigns about the dangers of cigarettes. Unfortunately, the voices of scientists and health authorities are often drowned out by powerful advertising and marketing by tobacco manufacturers.

Female smokers frequently complain of menstrual problems such as abnormal bleeding, amenorrhoea (absence of periods), abnormal vaginal discharge and vaginal infections. ♦ AFP

The dangers of smoking are well-known. It not only causes various types of cancer, but it also increases the risk of respiratory disease and heart disease, such as heart attacks. It is widely rumoured that the iconic Marlboro Man, whose image sold the world on the idea of smoking as a rugged, masculine lifestyle, died of lung cancer (or rather, the actor who portrayed Marlboro Man in the advertisements). But the idea that only cowboys die of smoking-related cancer is a myth. It is ordinary people who are suffering the consequences of smoking ♦ fathers, mothers, young men and women.

In the United States, 140,000 women die each year from smoking-related causes. In Peninsular Malaysia, lung cancer is the most common cancer among men, and the eighth most common cancer among women.

Because of the glamour associated with smoking, many women are blind to the health risks that they are exposing themselves to. Women who smoke are at far greater risk of many other problems that men do not suffer, simply because of a woman's unique biological and physiological make-up.

The highest rate of smoking occurs among women in their mid-twenties to their mid-forties. Alarmingly, almost all new smokers today are teenagers. In the US, over 1.5 million teenage girls are smokers.

Women and girls who smoke are at increased risk of cancers of the lung, mouth, larynx, pharynx, oesophagus, kidney, pancreas and bladder, as well as respiratory diseases like emphysema. But there are also other health risks that are uniquely female due to physiological and lifestyle differences, which puts women in a more dangerous position.

Here are a few reasons why women should never smoke.

Causes serious damage to unborn babies

Smoking is the worst thing a woman can do when she is pregnant. The toxic chemicals in cigarettes can be passed through the bloodstream to the foetus and cause serious damage to both baby and mother.

These chemicals can lead to premature birth, low birthweight of the baby, premature rupture of membranes, placenta previa (where the placenta grows in the lowest part of the uterus and covers all or part of the cervix), miscarriage and even death of the baby in the first 28 days.

Furthermore, children born to mothers who smoke suffer more illnesses, such as colds, earaches and respiratory problems.

Causes infertility

A woman who smokes is significantly less fertile than one who doesn't ♦ she has only 72% the fertility of a non-smoker and is likely to require more than a year to conceive.

Why do women smokers have more trouble having a baby? Studies have shown that smoking causes ovulation to decrease, whereby the ovaries

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release fewer eggs. Smoking also impairs the fertilisation between sperm and egg, as well as the implantation of the zygote on the uterus wall.

It is also believed that the chemicals in tobacco may alter the composition of cervical fluid, making it toxic to sperm and decreasing the likelihood of fertilisation.

If a baby is part of your future plans (and you never know), take cigarettes out of your life now.

Premature menopause and menstruation problems

Female smokers frequently complain of menstrual problems such as abnormal bleeding, amenorrhoea (absence of periods), abnormal vaginal discharge and vaginal infections.

Women who smoke also experience menopause two to three years earlier than normal. They are also more likely to have more severe vasomotor symptoms like hot flushes, irritability, night sweats, dryness of skin, premature aging of the skin and wrinkling. Premature menopause increases the risk of osteoporosis, heart attack and stroke at an earlier age.

It is believed that smoking causes these menstrual abnormalities and early menopause because the chemicals in cigarettes have a toxic effect on the ovaries.

Risk of osteoporosis

Asian women are already at higher risk of osteoporosis, a condition where the bones become fragile and break easily.

If you smoke a pack of cigarettes a day, you are increasing that risk significantly ♦ losing five to 10% more bone density compared to a non-smoker by the time you reach menopause.

The three most important lifestyle changes that can protect women from osteoporosis is to consume enough calcium daily (especially from a young age), exercise regularly and not smoke.

Risk of heart disease

In the US, approximately 34,000 women die every year from ischaemic heart disease related to smoking. It is recognised that the risk of heart disease increases for women after menopause, but even young women smokers are now being warned that blocked arteries may not be far down the road for them.

The cervical cancer link

Research has suggested that there is a link between smoking and cervical cancer, with one study finding that women smokers have an 80% greater risk of developing cervical cancer.

It is thought that smoking weakens the ability of cervical cells to fight off infection by the human papillomavirus (HPV), which is the main cause of cervical cancer. When the body is unable to defeat the HPV infection, it may cause abnormal cervical cells to multiply and develop into cancer.

For women smokers who have been diagnosed with cervical cancer, it is not too late to quit. If you quit or cut down, at least by 75%, you may stand a better chance of remission and survival.

Smoking and orgasmic disorder

Stop smoking. It is rough on the arteries and may cause difficulty in achieving orgasms. Smoking can cause blood vessels to constrict and decrease blood flow to the pelvic region.

The hormonal risk

Women who take some form of hormone therapy ♦ whether as oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy for menopause ♦ must be very careful of the dangers associated with smoking.

Women who take birth control pills and smoke face serious risks, such as blood clots, heart attacks and strokes. This risk increases with age, so women over 35 should not smoke and use oral contraceptives at the same time.

Smoking is also a danger with hormone replacement therapy, with women developing a similar risk of cardiovascular diseases. This can be potentially devastating, so if you are a smoker, be sure to discuss this with your doctor before starting on hormone replacement therapy.

There is nothing redeeming about the habit of smoking. For women, it ♦s the beginning of a downward spiral of their health.

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