

SMOKING & CANCER

A close-up photograph of a hand crushing a pile of cigarettes. The hand is positioned at the top right, with fingers pressing down on a cluster of cigarettes. The cigarettes are broken and crushed, with some ash and tobacco visible. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

What is Cancer?

Cancer refers to diseases in which abnormal cells divide out of control leading to abnormal excessive growth which are able to invade other tissues. Cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymph systems, which help the body get rid of toxins. There are more than 100 different types of cancer. Most cancers are named for the organ or type of cell in which they start—for example, lung cancer begins in the lung and laryngeal cancer begins in the larynx (voice box).

What's my cancer risk from smoking?

The number of years you spend smoking affects your cancer risk most strongly. For example, smoking one pack a day for 40 years is even more dangerous than smoking two packs a day for 20 years. Research has shown that for every 15 cigarettes smoked, there is a DNA change which could cause a cell in the body to become cancerous that means it is more likely for cancer to occur. People who smoke cigarettes are 15 to 30 times more likely to get lung cancer or die from lung cancer than people who do not smoke. Even smoking a few cigarettes, a day or smoking occasionally increases the risk of lung cancer. The more years a person smokes and the more cigarettes smoked each day; the more risk goes up.

How is smoking related to cancer?

Cigarette smoking can cause cancer almost anywhere in the body. Cigarette smoking causes cancer of the mouth and throat, esophagus, stomach, colon, rectum, liver, pancreas, voice box (larynx), trachea, lungs, kidney and renal pelvis, urinary bladder, cervix and causes acute myeloid leukemia (cancer of the blood).

More than 60 known carcinogens (cancer causing agents) have been detected in cigarette smoke, which include polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), nitrosamines, and aromatic amines; all play a crucial role in cancer development. Nicotine *per se* not only is the main addictive compound causing smokers to continue to their habit but also makes a contribution to the formation of cancer. Our bodies are designed to deal with a bit of damage, but they often can't cope with the amount of harmful chemicals in tobacco smoke.

Smoking can cause cancer when:

1. Poisons in cigarette smoke weaken the body's immune system, making it harder to kill cancer cells. When this happens, cancer cells keep growing without being stopped.
2. Poisons in tobacco smoke damage or change a cell's DNA. DNA is the cell's "instruction manual" that controls a cell's normal growth and function. When DNA is damaged, a cell can begin growing out of control and create a cancer tumor

What to do?

Stopping smoking completely is the best thing you can do for your health, and there are many ways you can do it. People who quit smoking have a lower risk of lung cancer than if they had continued to smoke, but their risk is higher than the risk for people who never smoked. Quitting smoking at any age can lower the risk of lung cancer. So, it's never too late to stop. Speak to your doctor about it.

For more information, comments and questions:

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