Cancer

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS) smoking accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths. This includes cancer of the lungs, larynx (voice box), oral cavity, pharynx (throat), esophagus, and bladder. It can also lead to the development of cancers of the pancreas, cervix, kidney, stomach, and also some leukemias.

The ACS also states that smoking is responsible for about 87% of lung cancer deaths. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in both men and women, and is one of the most difficult cancers to treat. Lung cancer is a disease that can in many cases be prevented. Groups that promote non-smoking as part of their religion, such as Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists, have much lower rates of lung cancer and other smoking-related cancers.

Ingredients in Tobacco

Cigarettes, cigars and spit and pipe tobacco are made from dried tobacco leaves, as well as ingredients added for flavor and other properties. More than 4,000 individual chemicals have been identified in tobacco and tobacco smoke. Among these are more than 60 chemicals that are known carcinogens (cancer-causing agents).

There are hundreds of substances added to cigarettes by manufacturers to enhance the flavor or to make the smoking experience more pleasant. Some of the compounds found in tobacco smoke include ammonia, tar, and carbon monoxide. Exactly what effects these substances have on the cigarette smoker’s health is unknown, but there is no evidence that lowering the tar content of a cigarette improves the health risk. Manufacturers do not usually give out information to the public about the additives used in cigarettes, so it is hard to know the health risks.
Nicotine Addiction

Addiction is characterized by the repeated, compulsive seeking or use of a substance despite its harmful effects and consequences. Addiction is defined as physical and psychological dependence on the substance. Nicotine is the addictive drug in tobacco. Regular use of tobacco products leads to addiction in a high proportion of users.

In 1988, the US Surgeon General concluded the following:

- Cigarettes and other forms of tobacco are addicting.
- Nicotine is the addicting drug in tobacco.
- The ways people become addicted to tobacco are similar to those that for addiction to other drugs such as heroin and cocaine.

Benefits of Quitting Smoking

Nicotine is a very addictive drug. People usually try to quit many times before they are successful. In September 1990, the US Surgeon General outlined the benefits of quitting smoking:

- Quitting smoking has major and immediate health benefits for people with and without smoking-related disease.
- Former smokers live longer than continuing smokers. For example, people who quit smoking before age 50 have one-half the risk of dying in the next 15 years compared with people who keep smoking.
- Quitting smoking decreases the risk of lung cancer, other cancers, heart attack, stroke, and chronic lung diseases such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis.
- Women who stop smoking before pregnancy or during the first 3 to 4 months of pregnancy reduce their risk of having a low birth-weight baby to that of women who never smoked.
- The health benefits of quitting smoking are far greater than any risks from the small weight gain (usually less than 10 pounds) or any emotional or psychological problems that may follow quitting.

The 1982 United States Surgeon General's Report stated that "Cigarette smoking is the major single cause of cancer mortality in the United States." This statement is as true today as it was in 1982.

Smoking is responsible for nearly 1 in 5 deaths in the United States. Because cigarette smoking and tobacco use are acquired behaviors -- activities that people choose to do -- smoking is the most preventable cause of premature death in our society.
Tobacco use is the most common preventable cause of death. About half of the people who don’t quit smoking will die of smoking-related problems. Quitting smoking is important for your health and provides many benefits. Soon after you quit, your circulation begins to improve, and your blood pressure starts to return to normal. Your sense of smell and taste return and breathing starts to become easier. In the long term, giving up tobacco can help you live longer. Your risk of getting cancer decreases with each year you stay smoke-free.

Quitting is not easy. You may have short-term effects such as weight gain, irritability and anxiety. Some people try several times before succeeding. There are many ways to quit smoking. Some people stop "cold turkey." Others benefit from step-by-step manuals, counseling or medicines or products that help reduce nicotine addiction. Your health care provider can help you find the best way for you to quit.

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