



## WOMEN'S HEALTH AND SMOKING

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In the United States, more than 21 million adult women and 1.8 million girls currently smoke cigarettes, putting them at risk for heart attacks, strokes, lung cancer, emphysema and other life-threatening illnesses.<sup>1</sup> As a result, more than 178,400 women die of smoking-caused disease each year, with additional deaths caused by the use of other tobacco products such as smokeless tobacco. While smoking harms and kills both males and females, women smokers face even greater health risks from smoking than men. In the United States, smoking rates among males and females in high school are almost equal (22.9 for males and 23.0 for females), and 18 percent of adult women are current smokers.<sup>2</sup>

### Mortality:

- Each year more than 178,000 U.S. women die from smoking-caused diseases.<sup>3</sup>
- Approximately four million women in the United States have died prematurely from smoking related diseases since the release of the Surgeon General's initial report on women and tobacco in 1980.<sup>4</sup>
- About 2.2 million years of potential life of U.S women are lost prematurely each year due to smoking related diseases.<sup>5</sup>

### Cardiovascular Disease:

- Cardiovascular diseases are the number one killers of both men and women. Each year more than 461,000 women die of these diseases.<sup>6</sup> Cardiovascular diseases caused by smoking include coronary heart disease, atherosclerosis, and stroke.<sup>7</sup>
- Women who smoke are about twice as likely to suffer a heart attack as non-smoking women. The risk of developing coronary heart disease increases with the number of cigarettes smoked per day, the total number of smoking years, and earlier age of initiation.<sup>8</sup>
- Women smokers have a higher relative risk of developing cardiovascular disease than men. The reasons for the difference are not yet known, but could be due to tobacco smoke having an adverse effect on estrogen.<sup>9</sup>
- Women who smoke and use oral contraceptives are up to 40 times more likely to have a heart attack than women who neither smoke nor use birth control.<sup>10</sup>
- While women smoke less than men, many nonsmoking women still suffer increased risk of heart disease from exposure to second-hand smoke because their husbands or partners smoke.<sup>11</sup>

### Lung Cancer:

- Lung cancer death rates among women increased by more than 600 percent between 1950 and 2003. By 1987, lung cancer had passed breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer death among women.<sup>12</sup>
- More than 63,000 U.S. women die of lung cancer each year. More than 60 percent of all cancer deaths among women are attributed to lung cancer.<sup>13</sup>
- Smoking causes about 90 percent of all lung cancer deaths among women.<sup>14,15</sup>
- A survey from the American Legacy Foundation found that 80 percent of American women mistakenly believe that breast cancer is the primary cause of cancer death among women.<sup>16</sup>
- The risk of developing lung cancer is 13 times higher for current women smokers compared to lifelong non-smokers.<sup>17</sup>
- While women smoke less than men, many nonsmoking women still suffer increased risk of lung cancer because their husbands or partners smoke.<sup>18</sup>

### Other Cancers:

- Smoking accounts for at least 30 percent of all cancer deaths.<sup>19</sup>
- Smoking is a known cause of cancer of the lung, larynx, oral cavity, and esophagus. Smoking has also been associated with stomach, bladder, kidney, and pancreatic cancer, and acute myeloid leukemia.<sup>20</sup>
- Women smokers have an increased risk of cervical cancer.<sup>21</sup>
- Women smokers may have increased risks for liver and colorectal cancer.<sup>22</sup>

### **Smoking and Pregnancy:**

- Smoking reduces a woman's fertility. Women smokers tend to take longer to conceive than women nonsmokers, and women smokers are at a higher risk of not being able to get pregnant at all. Furthermore, more cigarettes women smoked per day are associated with decreased fertility rates.<sup>23</sup>
- Research studies have found that smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke among pregnant women is a major cause of spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) after birth.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, 10.2 percent of pregnant women smoke.<sup>25</sup>
- Mothers who smoke have double the rate of premature delivery compared to nonsmoking mothers.<sup>26</sup>
- There is a clear relationship between the number of cigarettes smoked during pregnancy and low birth weight babies.<sup>27</sup>
- Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke during pregnancy directly increase the risk of health and behavioral problems including: abnormal blood pressure in infants and children, cleft palates and lips, childhood leukemia, infantile colic, childhood wheezing, respiratory disorders in childhood, eye problems during childhood, mental retardation, attention deficit disorder, behavioral problems and other learning and developmental problems.<sup>28</sup>

### **Other Health Risks for Women who Smoke:**

- Cigarette smoking is the primary cause of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) in women. Smoking is attributed for about 90 percent of deaths from COPD among U.S. women. The risk of COPD is directly related to the amount and duration of cigarette use.<sup>29</sup>
- Many women who smoke choose brands which are 'low tar' or lower nicotine brands. There is no evidence that a smoker who chooses low tar and nicotine brands reduces the risk of myocardial infarction, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or lung cancer.<sup>30,31</sup> In fact, a number of studies have linked low-tar cigarettes and smokers' compensation (especially their drawing smoke from low-tar cigarettes more deeply into lungs) to increases among smokers of adenocarcinoma, a previously rare type of lung cancer that afflicts the tiniest airways of the lung.<sup>32</sup>
- Women smokers have a greater risk for hip fracture than their non-smoking counterparts.<sup>33</sup>
- Women who smoke are more likely to have menstrual problems including painful periods, irregular bleeding, missed periods, and early onset of menopause.<sup>34</sup>
- Cigarette smoking is a risk factor for osteoporosis, and could become a more powerful factor among today's youth who have begun smoking at earlier ages. Women who are current smokers increase their risk for hip fractures and postmenopausal women who are current smokers have lower bone density versus women who never smoked.<sup>35</sup>
- Male and female smokers increase their risk of death from bronchitis and emphysema by nearly 10 times.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Benefits of Quitting:**

- Women who stop smoking reduce their risk of dying prematurely. While the benefits of quitting are greater at a younger age, quitting smoking has health benefits at any age.<sup>37</sup>
- 10 to 15 years after quitting, a female ex-smoker's risk of stroke is almost equal to that of a woman who never smoked.<sup>38</sup>

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- <sup>3</sup> CDC, "Annual Smoking-Attributable Mortality, Years of Potential Life Lost, and Economic Costs—United States 1997-2001," *MMWR* 54(25):625-628, July 1, 2005, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5425a1.htm>.
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Women and Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General*, Washington, DC: HHS, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General, 2001; CDC, "Annual Smoking-Attributable Mortality, Years of Potential Life Lost, and Economic Costs—United States 1995-2001," *MMWR* 54(25):625-628, July 1, 2005, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5425a1.htm>.
- <sup>5</sup> CDC, "Annual Smoking-Attributable Mortality, Years of Potential Life Lost, and Economic Costs—United States 1997-2001," *MMWR* 54(25):625-628, July 1, 2005, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5425a1.htm>.
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- <sup>7</sup> HHS, *The health consequences of smoking: A report of the Surgeon General*, Atlanta, GA: HHS, CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2004, [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/sgr\\_2004/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2004/index.htm).
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- <sup>9</sup> Prescott, E, et al., "Smoking and risk of myocardial infarction in women and men: Longitudinal population study," *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* 316:1043-7, 1998.
- <sup>10</sup> HHS, *Women and Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General*, Washington, DC: HHS, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General, 2001, [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/sgr\\_2001/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2001/index.htm).
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