

WOMEN AND SMOKING



This fact sheet is for public health professionals who are interested in information on how smoking affects women's health. Today, women smokers are as likely as men who smoke to suffer from many serious diseases and from early death caused by smoking.

In the last 50 years, a woman's risk of dying from smoking has more than tripled and is now equal to men's risk. The United States has more than 20 million women and girls who currently smoke cigarettes. Smoking puts them at risk for:

- heart attacks;
- strokes;
- lung cancer;
- emphysema; and
- other serious chronic illnesses such as diabetes.

More than 170,000 American women die of diseases caused by smoking each year, with additional deaths coming from the use of other tobacco products such as smokeless tobacco.

A TARGET MARKET

When the first Surgeon General's Report on smoking was released in 1964, it caused a rapid drop in smoking among men. Yet smoking rates among women continued to go up in the years immediately following the report as tobacco companies aggressively marketed to women. Documents from the tobacco industry show that cigarette companies created a line of slimmer cigarettes packaged in pastel colors to appeal to women, and implied that smoking could keep girls and women thin. They also used slogans, advertising, and sports sponsorships to tie their products to the women's rights movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The women most likely to smoke today are among the most vulnerable—those disadvantaged by low income, less education, and mental health disorders. Women in these groups are also less likely to quit smoking when they become pregnant and are more likely to start smoking again after delivery. This worsens the dangerous health effects from smoking on mothers and their children.

DISEASE AND WOMEN SMOKERS

Many of the findings in the 2014 Surgeon General's Report are especially important for women who smoke. Between 1959 and 2010, lung cancer risk for smokers rose dramatically. While men's risk doubled, the risk among female smokers increased nearly ten-fold. Today, more women die from lung cancer than breast cancer.

RESPIRATORY DISEASES

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) includes emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and other conditions that damage airways. People with the disease suffer from shortness of breath and lack of oxygen that worsens over time. COPD has no cure. Nearly 9 out of 10 cases of COPD are caused by smoking. Women smokers in certain age groups are up to 38 times more likely to develop COPD than women who have never smoked. More women than men are now dying every year from COPD, and women appear more susceptible to developing severe COPD at younger ages.

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

For more than half a century, the evidence that smoking causes cardiovascular disease has grown steadily. Today, women over age 35 who smoke have a slightly higher risk of dying from coronary heart disease than men who smoke. They are also slightly more likely to die from an abdominal aortic aneurysm—a weakened and bulging area of the artery that runs through the abdomen and carries blood to the major organs—than men who smoke.

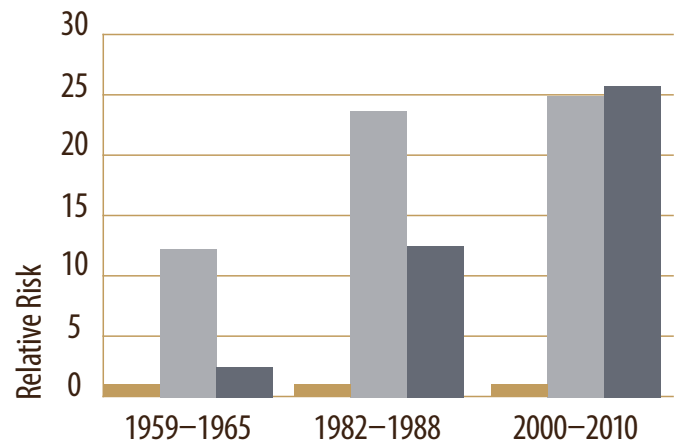
SMOKING AND PREGNANCY

Smoking during pregnancy causes premature birth, low birth weight, certain birth defects, and ectopic pregnancy in which the fertilized egg implants somewhere in the abdomen other than the womb. Smoking during pregnancy also causes complications with the placenta, the organ through which nutrients pass from mother to fetus. These complications include placenta previa and placental abruption, conditions that jeopardize the life and health of both mother and child. Women who are pregnant or who are planning a pregnancy should not smoke. It's important to encourage women to quit smoking before or early in pregnancy, when the most health benefits can be achieved, but cessation in all stages, even in late pregnancy, benefits maternal and fetal health.

CESSATION

Nicotine addiction can be difficult to overcome, but over half of smokers in the United States have already quit. There are many support programs and cessation tools available to smokers who want to quit, including nicotine replacement products such as patches and gum, prescription medication, and free coaching. Benefits to women's health from quitting smoking are enormous and immediate. Heart attack risks drop dramatically in the first year and within five years, women who have quit smoking can see their stroke risk drop to that of a never smoker. In 10 years, a woman's risk of dying from lung cancer is cut in half. Women who want to quit smoking should ask their doctors for help, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW, or visit women.smokefree.gov and cdc.gov/tips.

Most people find a combination of resources works best. Many smokers do not quit on their first attempt. Many need several tries to successfully quit. But the benefits are well worth it. Keep trying.



RESOURCES FOR QUITTING

- Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW.
- www.women.smokefree.gov
- www.cdc.gov/tips



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Office on Smoking and Health