

Women and Smoking

Key Points

- Smoking increases a woman's risk of cancer and other health problems (see Question 1).
- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in U.S. women (see Question 2).
- Quitting smoking offers immediate and long-term health benefits (see Questions 3 and 4).
- Resources are available to help women quit smoking (see Question 5).

1. Are women who smoke at increased risk of health problems?

Yes. Women and men who smoke are at increased risk of developing cancer, heart disease, and lung disease and of dying prematurely (1, 2).

A pregnant smoker is at higher risk of having her baby born too early and with an abnormally low weight. A woman who smokes during or after pregnancy increases her infant's risk of death from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) (1, 2).

In addition, some studies suggest that women who smoke are more likely to experience irregular or painful periods. Smokers are more likely than nonsmokers to go through menopause at a younger age. Women who smoke after menopause have lower bone density and a higher risk of hip fracture than do women who don't smoke (1).

2. Does smoking increase cancer risk in women?

Yes. Smoking causes cancers of the lung, esophagus, larynx (voice box), mouth, throat, kidney, bladder, pancreas, stomach, and cervix, as well as acute myeloid leukemia (2). In 1987, lung cancer surpassed breast cancer to become the leading cause of cancer death in U.S. women. Unlike early breast cancer and many other types of cancer, lung cancer is rarely curable (3). Most deaths from lung cancer among U.S. women are caused by smoking (1).

3. What are the immediate benefits of quitting smoking for women?

The immediate health benefits of quitting smoking are substantial. Within a few hours, the level of carbon monoxide in the blood begins to decline. (Carbon monoxide reduces the blood's ability to carry oxygen.) The former smoker's heart rate and blood pressure, which were abnormally high while smoking, begin to return to normal. Within a few weeks, women who quit smoking have improved circulation, don't produce as much phlegm, and don't cough or wheeze as often. Women can also expect significant improvements in lung function within several months of quitting (4).

Also, women who quit smoking reduce the risk of infertility, and pregnant women who quit early in their pregnancy reduce the risk of the baby being born too early and with an abnormally low weight (1, 5).



4. What are the long-term benefits of quitting smoking for women?

Quitting smoking dramatically reduces the risk of developing an illness caused by smoking (2, 6):

- The risk of death from heart disease is substantially reduced within 1 or 2 years after quitting, and eventually becomes the same as that of nonsmokers.
- The risk of death from lung cancer and other lung diseases declines steadily, beginning about 5 years after quitting.
- Quitting smoking as early in life as possible is likely to reduce the risk of fractures that would be caused by smoking in old age.

Regardless of age, women can substantially reduce the risk of disease, including cancer, by quitting smoking. For women who have already developed cancer, quitting smoking helps the body to heal and to respond to cancer treatment, and quitting reduces the risk of developing a second cancer.

5. What resources are available to help women quit smoking?

General Resources

Government resources that provide information about quitting for all smokers include the following:

- The Tobacco Control Research Branch of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) established the **Smokefree.gov** Web site (<http://smokefree.gov>) in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other organizations. Publications available from the Web site at <http://www.smokefree.gov/resources.aspx> include the following:
 - [Clearing the Air: Quit Smoking Today](#) for smokers interested in quitting.
 - [Clear Horizons](#) for smokers over age 50.
 - [Forever Free™](#) for smokers who have recently quit.
 - [Forever Free for Baby and Me™](#) (also in [Spanish](#)) for pregnant smokers who have recently quit.
 - [Guía para Dejar de Fumar](#) (*Guide to Quit Smoking*) for Spanish-speaking smokers.
 - [Pathways to Freedom](#) for African American smokers.
- The **National Network of Tobacco Cessation Quitlines** [1-800-784-8669 (1-800-QUITNOW)], an initiative of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, routes callers to a state-run quitline where they can receive help with quitting smoking, publications, and referrals to other resources. Information about this service can be found on the Smokefree.gov Web site.
- The **National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Smoking Quitline** at 1-877-448-7848 (1-877-44U-QUIT) offers a wide range of services, including individualized counseling, printed information, referrals to other sources, and recorded messages. Smoking cessation counselors are available to answer smoking-related questions in English or Spanish, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Eastern time. Smoking cessation counselors are also available through **LiveHelp** (an online instant messaging service) at <http://www.cancer.gov/livehelp> on the Internet. LiveHelp is available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., Eastern time.

Resources for Women

Several organizations provide information specifically for women, including the following:

- NCI's Tobacco Control Research Branch established the **Smokefree Women** Web site at <http://women.smokefree.gov> in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other organizations.

The Smokefree Women Web site allows women to choose the help that best fits their immediate and long-term needs. The Web site features the following resources:

- [An online step-by-step cessation guide.](#)
- Information about a wide range of topics related to smoking and quitting.
- Self-quizzes about important subjects like depression, withdrawal, and relationships.

- [NCI's instant messaging service.](#)
- [Publications, which may be downloaded, printed, or ordered.](#)
- The **Office on Women's Health** of the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** has established a special section on its Web site called "Smoking and How to Quit." This section includes information about the health effects of smoking and provides resources to help women quit smoking.

Address: Room 712E
200 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, DC 20201
Telephone: 1-800-994-9662
Internet Web site: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/quit-smoking/>

- The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC) and the **Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry** (ATSDR) established the **Office of Women's Health** (OWH) to promote and improve the health, safety, and quality of life of women. A section of the OWH Web site contains information about smoking and tobacco for women.

Address: CDC/ATSDR Office of Women's Health
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Mail Stop E-89
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333
Telephone: 404-498-2300
E-mail: owh@cdc.gov
Internet Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/women/az/smoking.htm>

Selected References

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Women and Smoking—A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2001.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2004.
3. Ries LAG, Harkins D, Krapcho M, et al. *SEER Cancer Statistics Review, 1975–2003*. Bethesda, MD: National Cancer Institute, 2006.
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Benefits of Smoking Cessation*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control, Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 1990.
5. Cnattingius S. The epidemiology of smoking during pregnancy: Smoking prevalence, maternal characteristics, and pregnancy outcomes. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* 2004; 6(Supplement 2):S125–S140.
6. National Cancer Institute (1997). *Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph 8: Changes in Cigarette-Related Disease Risks and Their Implications for Prevention and Control*. Bethesda, MD. Retrieved July 26, 2010, from: <http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/8/index.html>.

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Related NCI materials and Web pages:

- National Cancer Institute Fact Sheet 10.17, "Light" Cigarettes and Cancer Risk (<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Tobacco/light-cigarettes>)

- National Cancer Institute Fact Sheet 10.18, *Secondhand Smoke and Cancer* (<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Tobacco/ETS>)
- National Cancer Institute Fact Sheet 10.19, *Harms of Smoking and Health Benefits of Quitting* (<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Tobacco/cessation>)
- *Clearing the Air: Quit Smoking Today* (http://www.smokefree.gov/pubs/Clearing-The-Air_acc.pdf)
- Smoking Home Page (<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/smoking>)

How can we help?

We offer comprehensive research-based information for patients and their families, health professionals, cancer researchers, advocates, and the public.

- **Call** NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)
- **Visit** us at <http://www.cancer.gov> or <http://www.cancer.gov/espanol>
- **Chat** using LiveHelp, NCI's instant messaging service, at <http://www.cancer.gov/livehelp>
- **E-mail** us at cancergovstaff@mail.nih.gov
- **Order** publications at <http://www.cancer.gov/publications> or by calling 1-800-4-CANCER
- **Get help** with quitting smoking at 1-877-44U-QUIT (1-877-448-7848)

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