

Lung cancer isn't the only health risk for smokers



Cigarettes can destroy your health — and that of those around you

Have you heard the worst thing about smoking? Probably not.

Researchers are learning more about the devastating toll that smoking can take on the human body, including some of the following:¹

- Tobacco smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals, hundreds of which are toxic and about 70 can cause cancer
- The poisonous chemicals in cigarettes reach every organ in your body
- Smoking causes inflammation and damages cells throughout the body, disrupting the body's ability to heal
- Once tobacco has damaged cells, they can grow uncontrollably as cancer
- Smoking can cause cancer almost anywhere in the body: mouth, nose, throat, larynx, trachea, esophagus, lungs, stomach, pancreas, kidneys, bladder, cervix, bone marrow and blood

Cancer isn't the only health danger

It's truly frightening to see how many types of cancer can be caused by smoking. But cancer is just one of the many health risks — smoking can literally take your breath away.

Here's a partial list of respiratory and other diseases caused or complicated by smoking:¹

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), for which there is no cure. COPD includes lung diseases, such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis. People with COPD can have a severely compromised quality of life, including dependence on supplemental oxygen to breathe. Smokers are 12 to 13 times more likely to die from COPD than non-smokers.
- Increased risk of getting and dying from tuberculosis, an infection that usually attacks the lungs
- Active smokers are 30 to 40 percent more likely to develop diabetes than non-smokers. Smoking also makes diabetes harder to control.
- Higher risk for diabetes complications, like heart and kidney disease, amputation, retinopathy (which leads to blindness) and nerve damage
- Changes to your blood chemistry due to harmful substances in tobacco that can lead to:
 - Aneurysms (bulging blood vessels that can burst and may kill you)
 - Stroke (sudden death of brain cells caused by blood clots or bleeding)
 - Heart attacks and damage to your arteries



You're not the only one at risk

You may believe that smoking is a personal choice and that only the smoker will suffer from its adverse effects. But we now know that smoking can put other people at tremendous risk.

Exposure to secondhand smoke has immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system and can cause coronary heart disease and stroke. It also interferes with the normal functioning of the heart, blood and vascular systems in ways that increase the risk of having a heart attack.² Even brief exposures to secondhand smoke can damage the lining of blood vessels and cause your blood platelets to become stickier. These changes can cause a deadly heart attack.

Does a friend, family member or co-worker have asthma? If so, then you know how frightening an asthma attack can be, watching someone struggling to breathe. Breathing in secondhand smoke can trigger an asthma attack in a non-smoker, child or adult.²

Fortunately, exposure to secondhand smoke has declined in the U.S., but progress has not been the same for everyone. Secondhand smoke exposure is more common among children ages 3 to 11 years, non-Hispanic Black Americans, people living below the poverty level and people who rent housing. There is still work to do to ensure we achieve smoke-free air for all.²

When you think about the health risks of smoking, keep in mind the smoker is not only at risk — so is everyone around them breathing in secondhand smoke.

Sources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health Effects of Cigarette Smoking, October 29, 2021. Available from www.cdc.gov.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health Effects of Secondhand Smoke, June 14, 2021. Available from www.cdc.gov.

The information and materials included in MetLife's Health and Wellness Information Library, including all toolkits, modules, template communications, text, charts, graphics and other materials, (collectively, the "Content") are intended to provide general guidance on health and wellness matters and are not, and should not be relied on as, medical advice. While the Content is based on resources that MetLife believes to be well-documented, MetLife is not responsible for the accuracy of the Content, and you rely on the Content at your own risk. Each person's condition and health circumstances are unique, and therefore the Content may not apply to you. The Content is not a substitute for professional medical advice. You should always consult your licensed health care professional for the diagnosis and treatment of any medical condition and before starting or changing your health regimen, including seeking advice regarding what drugs, diet, exercise routines, physical activities or procedures are appropriate for your particular condition and circumstances.