



FEAR
TEEN

SMOKING



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Teen
FAQ
Smoking

Teen FAQ Smoking

Patience Coster



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1

About smoking

People have smoked tobacco since ancient times, either for enjoyment or as a way of socializing. Tobacco products are made from the dried leaves of the tobacco plant, which grows in warm parts of the world. Today, tobacco is available in a variety of forms, including cigarettes, cigars, cigarillos (small, narrow cigars), rolling tobacco (for people who want to make their own cigarettes from loose tobacco and cigarette papers), pipe tobacco, and bidis (made from tobacco rolled in a **tendu leaf**, particularly popular in parts of Asia).



Tobacco grows in warm countries. It is usually harvested by machine and then stored so that it dries out gradually. This improves the flavor.

In the developed world, cigarettes are the most commonly smoked tobacco product. The most well-known **constituents** of cigarettes are tar, a brown, sticky liquid, and nicotine, a drug. Tar builds up in the smoker's **lungs**, forming a sticky mass. Nicotine is highly addictive, which means the smoker wants to continue smoking and finds it very difficult to give up the habit.

There are more than 4,000 chemicals in cigarette smoke, many of them damaging to our bodies and known to cause cancer. As well as tar and nicotine, cigarettes contain **benzene, formaldehyde, ammonia, acetone, carbon monoxide, arsenic, hydrogen cyanide, and polonium 210**. A link between smoking tobacco and lung cancer was discovered in Germany in the 1920s. Now it is evident that smoking causes other forms of cancer, too.

If smoking is so dangerous, then why do people do it? One reason is that during the early stages, smoking releases **dopamine** and **endorphins** in the smoker's body. These substances are associated with feelings of pleasure and reward.



Roll-your-own cigarettes are popular because they are generally cheaper than the ready-made variety.

“What often starts out as an ‘act of independence’ may rapidly become an addictive dependence on tobacco. The younger people start smoking cigarettes, the more likely they are to become strongly addicted to nicotine.”

World Health Organization



WHAT IS NICOTINE?

Nicotine is an **alkaloid** found in the nightshade family of plants (Solanaceae), predominantly in tobacco and coca. It was used as an insecticide in the past, and nicotine **derivatives** continue to be widely used in this way. In low concentrations (an average cigarette yields about 1 mg of absorbed nicotine), it acts as a stimulant and is largely responsible for the addictive properties of smoking.

Smoking—don’t start!

The best way to avoid becoming addicted to cigarettes is not to start smoking them in the first place. Children and teenagers make up the majority of new smokers. Nearly half of all smokers under the age of 30 started smoking by the age of 15. As a rule, people who have not tried smoking in their teens never come to it in their adult years. Children are also more likely to become smokers if their parents or friends smoke.

A GLAMOROUS HABIT?

Research by Dartmouth Medical School and Norris Cotton Cancer Center has shown that one-third of American teenagers start smoking because they are influenced by watching actors smoke in movies. One of the research leaders, Dr. James Sargent, said: “We found that as the amount of exposure to smoking in movies increased, the rate of smoking also increased.”

“A half century of aggressive promotion and sophisticated advertising that featured alluring role models from theater, film, and sport has invested the cigarette with an enticing imagery ... imagery which captivates and seduces a growing youngster. The youngster, indispensable for being recruited into the future army of smokers, does not start to smoke cigarettes for the nicotine, but for the false promises they hold. Hence, deceit is in a cigarette.”

K. H. Ginzler, Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology, the University of Arkansas, Arkansas



Statistics show that children whose parents smoke are twice as likely to smoke as children of nonsmokers.

Today, the dangers of tobacco and smoking cigarettes are well known. Smoking is a major risk factor for **strokes**, heart attacks, breathing problems (including emphysema), lung cancer, and cancers of the mouth, throat, and pancreas (see pages 22–23). If women smoke while they are pregnant, they run a higher risk of **miscarriage** and are in danger of harming their unborn baby in other ways. Babies of smokers are more likely to be born prematurely, have a low birth weight or succumb to **sudden infant death syndrome**.

IT HAPPENED TO ME

I smoked my first cigarette with some older friends when I was 12 years old. Since then, I've smoked more and more, and now I'm on around 20 a day. I've tried to give it up but feel unhappy and grouchy when I do. I've begun to think that smoking and thinking about cigarettes controls my life.



Some studies show that 80 percent of smokers begin before the age of 18.

Why do people smoke cigarettes?

Most smokers take up the habit during adolescence or in early adulthood. At this time in their lives, many young people are making new relationships and trying to fit in with what others are doing. A lot of teenagers start smoking to win group acceptance.

If your friends smoke, as a nonsmoker you may feel left out and isolated, so you may start smoking to “join in.” Another reason that young people start smoking is because of the social image they want to present to others. They feel it makes them look “cool” and grown-up. After they have been smoking for a while, nicotine addiction makes them continue with the habit.



A lot of teenagers start smoking as part of a group activity.

Celebrities and smoking

A lot of us are influenced by how celebrities behave and look. Photos showing celebrities smoking can make the activity look tough and sophisticated. Celebrities who smoke are often seen as “edgy” or rebellious, and they represent a risk-taking spirit that appeals to some teenagers.

HEALTH WARNING

Smoking may kill the craving for food. Teenagers tend to worry about their looks and their weight much more than people of other ages. They learn about weight-control methods mostly from their friends, so they start skipping meals and substituting them with cigarettes. However, smoking also damages a person’s appearance.



Celebrities who smoke can make it look glamorous, particularly if they are fashion models who also give the illusion that smoking helps with weight control.

Will smoking help me lose weight?

Dear Agony Aunt,

I want to become a model, but when I see pictures of professional models in magazines, they are all so much skinnier than I am. I want to lose weight, and my friend tells me to take up smoking because it is an appetite **suppressant**. I know a lot of fashion models smoke, and it doesn't look like it's done them much harm. Can't I just take up smoking and give it up when I reach the right weight?

Harper, 13

Dear Harper,

Smoking damages your taste buds, so food tastes bland, and you don't enjoy eating as much. In this way, it can help you lose weight. It also increases your heart rate, so you use more energy and burn a few more calories each day. But it is so damaging to your heart and your body generally that the disadvantages far outweigh the benefits. Nicotine has been found to suppress appetite, but in some cases it has also been observed to increase appetite. Nicotine is also highly addictive—so taking up smoking for a short while is not really an option. You might find it very difficult to give up.

Relieving stress

Some people think smoking aids relaxation and reduces stress. But these beneficial feelings depend on the smoker continuing to smoke and therefore harming his or her health. Scientists say that the nicotine in cigarettes reduces the **withdrawal symptoms** between smoking one cigarette and the next. This means that the only way a smoker will “feel better” and “relaxed” is to continue smoking!

Mixed emotions

Being a teenager is a time when strong emotions sometimes make it hard to stay calm and focused. Teenagers may think that smoking cigarettes will make them feel at ease and more confident. Some young people take up smoking because they believe it makes them feel more secure in themselves.

“It is the children with the most desperate need to change themselves, or prop themselves up, who seem most likely to adopt a chemical support-system which may eventually destroy them.”

**Penelope Leach,
*The Parents’ A to Z***



Teenage years form a bridge between childhood and adulthood; many teenagers who smoke do so because it makes them feel more mature.

Teenage years are often a time of rebellion, so teens may smoke to rebel against their parents. If they ignore what their parents tell them, it makes them feel in control, more able to make independent decisions—in short, more adult.



Nicotine has also been found to activate areas of the brain involved in producing feelings of pleasure and reward.

Will smoking help me succeed in school?

Dear Agony Aunt,

I get very nervous as school exams approach. Some of my friends are smokers, and they say if I take up smoking, it will really relax me and help me concentrate. Is this true?

Malika, 16

Dear Malika,

*There is evidence that nicotine can help boost memory and concentration. In fact, scientists are working on developing a nicotine pill to treat people with memory problems, such as **Alzheimer's disease**. But taking a pill prescribed by a doctor is very different from smoking cigarettes. If you smoke, your body needs to keep its nicotine levels up. Otherwise you suffer from withdrawal symptoms, one of which is poor concentration. This means you have to keep smoking and will become physically and emotionally dependent on cigarettes. One important scientific discovery is the effect nicotine can have on the developing teenage brain. Scientists have found that it can disrupt the nerve connections and make it harder for teenagers to concentrate. There are plenty of better, safer ways of improving your concentration, such as eating "brain foods" like fish, removing distractions (such as the TV or stereo being on in the background), and getting enough sleep at night.*

Addiction

Everyone knows that smoking is harmful, but few people realize just how risky and addictive it is. Tobacco addiction starts when the smoker develops a dependence on nicotine. Once this happens, if you stop smoking cigarettes, you will experience unpleasant withdrawal symptoms because your body has to readjust to coping without the drug.

Can't I give up any time?

Dear Agony Aunt,

Since my early teens, I have been a fairly heavy smoker, but I don't feel like I'm an addict. I've heard all about the dangers of smoking, and my uncle died of lung cancer, so I know it's not a good idea. But I'm sure I can quit any time I want. Right?

Marco, 19

Dear Marco,

You may think you can give up at any time, but your addiction could be more powerful than you realize. You can become addicted to nicotine in a few days and after just a pack or two of cigarettes. Surveys have shown that one-third of smokers tend to light up their first cigarette half an hour after they wake in the morning; one smoker in 12 lights up within the first five minutes. More than half say they would find it difficult to go for a week without smoking, and three-quarters believe they would find it hard to give up altogether. Also, because you started smoking in your early teens, you run a greater risk of dying prematurely from heart disease, lung cancer, and emphysema if you continue smoking. So the best way forward is to see your doctor and ask about ways of giving up smoking completely as soon as you can.

Withdrawal symptoms

Nicotine withdrawal symptoms include irritability, nervousness, dry mouth, headaches, problems with concentration, disturbed sleep, increased appetite, and sometimes even full-blown depression. The symptoms may start within a few hours of smoking the last cigarette. This is one reason why people trying to quit smoking often quickly return to it again. Nicotine has been shown to be addictive in ways similar to drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and alcohol. Over time, smokers develop a tolerance to nicotine and can absorb higher doses without feeling ill.

HEALTH WARNING

The chances are that about one in three smokers who do not stop will eventually die because of their smoking. Some will die in their forties; others will die later. They may die 10 years or more earlier than they would have done had they died from other causes.



Smoking bans in public places such as offices, restaurants, and bars have forced smokers to take their habit outside.



Light or social smokers are relatively few among the smoking population.

What if I smoke less?

Some people believe it is less harmful to their health if they smoke fewer cigarettes, or smoke low tar “light” or “mild” brands. It is probably true that light smokers (people smoking fewer than five cigarettes a day) are damaging their health less than moderate smokers (people smoking between 5 and 20 a day) and heavy smokers (people smoking more than 20 per day). But light smokers are relatively few in number among the smoking population generally, which suggests that people often find it difficult to limit the number of cigarettes they consume. Once a habit is established, the smoker is likely to increase the number of cigarettes they smoke. There really is no safe level of smoking. Smoking any type of tobacco products, at whatever rate, damages the human body. Smoking even a few cigarettes a day, or several cigars a week, is dangerous for your health.

The low-tar option

There is no such thing as a safe cigarette. People who switch to low-tar or light brands are likely to inhale the same amount of dangerous chemicals. They are also likely to “compensate” by smoking more, or by taking more “drags” from each cigarette. Low-tar tobacco products can inflict the same damage upon the smoker’s health as high-tar cigarettes, especially if the smoker takes deeper puffs. Some people believe that switching to lighter brands will help them give up smoking, but this is not the case.

IT HAPPENED TO ME

My father died of lung cancer six years ago. As a result, I decided to limit my own smoking habit. I managed to smoke around five cigarettes a day for a couple of weeks, but then I went out with my friends on a Friday evening and smoked an entire pack! I’m beginning to realize that the only real way to control the habit is to give up smoking altogether.

Delmar, 16

“It is extremely unlikely that a ‘safe’ cigarette could ever be developed. The chemicals that are formed when tobacco is burned are naturally harmful. Filters may stop smokers from inhaling some of the solid particles in inhaled smoke. But they do not block out the many toxic gases in smoke, such as hydrogen cyanide, ammonia, and carbon monoxide.”

Cancer Research

United Kingdom



There is no such thing as a safe cigarette. Despite the stark health warnings found on cigarette packs, however, people continue to buy them in large numbers.

Smoking and your health

You may eat five portions of fruit and vegetables each day and exercise regularly, but if you smoke you will undo most of the benefits of an otherwise healthy lifestyle. Research has indicated that smoking may reduce life expectancy by 10 years or more. Each time you light up, that single cigarette takes between five and twenty minutes off your life. When you smoke a cigarette, the burning tobacco produces various **toxins** (poisons). The tar from a cigarette causes cancer and clogs the lungs, nicotine increases **cholesterol** levels, and carbon monoxide reduces the amount of oxygen in the body.

HEALTH WARNING

Nicotine is a poisonous chemical. It increases the smoker's risk of developing lung cancer, **impotence**, stroke, heart attack, and circulatory diseases. It takes just 15 seconds for nicotine to reach a smoker's brain. While small amounts result in feelings of pleasure and relaxation, bigger amounts produce agitation, nausea, and dizziness. After around 40 minutes, the nicotine's pleasurable effects begin to wear off, and the smoker will soon feel the need to light up again.



An X-ray of lungs shows emphysema bubbles in the left lung (a disease caused by smoking that damages the lining of the lungs).

“Cigarette use is a powerful determinant [a factor that makes something happen] of developing high depressive symptoms ... In fact, nondepressed teens who smoke face approximately a four times greater risk of developing depression than nonsmoking teens.”

Elizabeth Goodman, M.D., Associate Professor of Pediatrics in the division of Adolescent Medicine at the Children’s Hospital Medical Center of Cincinnati, Ohio

“[In a U.S. study,] about two-thirds of adolescent smokers indicated that they wanted to quit smoking, and 70 percent said that they would not have started if they could choose again.”

World Health Organization



Teenage smoking has been linked to depression, panic attacks, and anxiety disorders.

Teen smokers

Every day in the United States alone, around 3,000 young people under the age of 18 take up smoking. Teenage smokers have smaller lungs and weaker hearts than nonsmokers. They are also more likely to become ill and to use alcohol and other drugs; for example, they are 13 times more likely to use cannabis than nonsmokers. They become more tired because smoking prevents oxygen from reaching the heart, and they cough and wheeze three times more than teens who don’t smoke.

Smokers as young as 18 years of age have shown evidence of developing depression and heart disease. Teenage smoking has also been linked to panic attacks and anxiety disorders.

Lungs and breathing

When you start smoking, this irritates the **cells** lining the air tubes in the lungs, which produce a slimy substance called **mucus** as a form of protection. The buildup of mucus in the lungs makes the smoker cough. Over time, mucus can reduce the diameter of the air tubes and let less air into the lungs. This is very serious for people who already have breathing difficulties.

Tar

Tar also contributes to a smoker's cough; it builds up in the lungs like soot. If you smoke 20 cigarettes a day, you will be breathing in a full cup of tar in a year.

Carbon monoxide

Smoking also means the poisonous gas carbon monoxide enters the smoker's bloodstream. This reduces the amount of oxygen that is carried around the body, so the smoker feels breathless. It's a lot harder to breathe while exercising when you are a smoker, because smoking makes the heart and lung function less efficiently.

COPD

Smoking is the main cause of a condition called **chronic** obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). This describes a number of lung conditions such as chronic **bronchitis** and emphysema (see above left) that cause breathing difficulties. Symptoms include breathlessness, a chronic cough, regularly coughing up **phlegm**, wheezing, weight loss, disturbed sleep patterns, swollen ankles, and feeling tired. About one in eight people who smoke one pack of cigarettes a day will develop COPD. This rate rises to one in four among people who smoke two packs a day.

HEALTH WARNING

Emphysema is a disease caused by the chemicals in tobacco smoke, which damage the lining of the lungs. People with emphysema often get bronchitis repeatedly and suffer lung and heart failure. The gradual deterioration in a person's ability to breathe can lead to a slow and painful death.

“New research indicates premature infants whose mothers smoked during pregnancy had a higher heart rate and more trouble breathing than preemies [babies born prematurely] whose mothers didn't smoke ... Dr. Shabih Hasan, a pediatrics professor and coauthor, said preemies whose mothers smoked would pause their breathing and be slow to recover from it to breathe normally.”

**CBC News report,
August 2008**



Smoking is the main cause of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which covers a number of lung conditions.

Lung cancer

Cancers caused by smoking include those of the lungs, mouth, and throat. In more than 80 percent of all cases, lung cancer is caused entirely by smoking. You are more likely to get lung cancer if you smoke a lot rather than a little, but it is the length of time you have been a smoker that is the most important factor. Smokers who start when they are young run a greater risk of developing lung cancer. The minute you stop smoking, your risk of lung cancer starts to go down. Most cases of mouth and throat cancer are related to tobacco and alcohol use; people who smoke and drink heavily are 15 times more likely to develop these types of cancer than people who don't.

Other cancers

Tobacco smoke is also a cause of pancreatic, kidney, bladder, and cervical cancers. Although these parts of the body do not have direct contact with tobacco smoke, tumors may form because cancer-causing substances are absorbed into the bloodstream. They are then transported to different organs in the body and destroy the cells there.

The pancreas is a gland that is part of the digestive system. Scientists believe that chemicals called

nitrosamines, present in cigarette smoke, may cause pancreatic cancer. The survival rate for pancreatic cancer is low. Around 24 percent of kidney cancer cases in men and 9 percent in women are caused by smoking. Smokers are between two and five times more likely to develop bladder cancer than nonsmokers. A study in Sweden found that smoking was the second most significant environmental factor in causing cancer of the cervix in women.



Before his death from pancreatic cancer in 2009, actor Patrick Swayze declared that his chain-smoking probably “had something to do with” the disease.

“In 2009, in the United States, about 169,000 people will die of cancer because of their use of tobacco products. This number represents at least 30 percent of all estimated cancer deaths in the United States.”

Cancer Facts and Figures 2009, American Cancer Society

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