



WOMEN'S HEALTH AND SMOKING

In the United States, more than 20 million adult women and more than 1.5 million girls currently smoke cigarettes, putting them at risk for heart attacks, strokes, lung cancer, emphysema and other life-threatening illnesses.¹ As a result, more than 170,000 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. Today, almost one out of every five high school girls currently smoke (18.7 percent)² and 17.4 percent of women still smoke.³

Mortality:

- Each year more than 170,000 U.S. women die from smoking-caused diseases.⁴
- 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 1980.⁵
- About 2.1 million years of potential life of U.S women are lost prematurely each year due to smoking related diseases.⁶

Cardiovascular Disease:

- Cardiovascular diseases are the number one killers of both men and women. Each year more than 450,000 women die of these diseases.⁷ Cardiovascular diseases caused by smoking include coronary heart disease, atherosclerosis and stroke, among others.⁸
- Women who smoke are 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.⁹
- 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.¹⁰
- 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.¹¹
- While women smoke less than men, many nonsmoking women still suffer increased risk of heart disease from exposure to secondhand smoke because their husbands or partners smoke.¹²

Lung Cancer:

- Lung cancer death rates among women increased by more than 600 percent between 1950 and 2003. In 1987, lung cancer surpassed breast cancer to become the leading cause of cancer death among women.¹³
- More than 66,000 U.S. women die of lung cancer each year.¹⁴
- While lung cancer death rates are decreasing for men – and the overall cancer death rate is decreasing for both men and women – lung cancer death rates have yet to decline among women, according to a December 2008 report by the nation's leading cancer organizations.¹⁵
- Smoking causes about 90 percent of all lung cancer deaths among women.¹⁶
- The risk of developing lung cancer is 13 times higher for current women smokers compared to lifelong non-smokers.¹⁷
- 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.¹⁸
- While women smoke less than men, many nonsmoking women still suffer increased risk of lung cancer because their husbands or partners smoke.¹⁹

Other Cancers:

- Smoking accounts for at least 30 percent of all cancer deaths.²⁰
- Smoking is a known cause of cancer of the lung, larynx, oral cavity, bladder, pancreas, uterus, cervix, kidney, stomach and esophagus.²¹
- Women smokers have an increased risk of cervical cancer.²²
- Women smokers may have increased risks for liver and colorectal cancer.²³

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.²⁴
- 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.²⁵ Nevertheless, 10.7 percent of pregnant women smoke.²⁶
- Mothers who smoke have double the rate of premature delivery compared to nonsmoking mothers.²⁷
- There is a clear relationship between the number of cigarettes smoked during pregnancy and low birth weight babies.²⁸
- 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.²⁹

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 80 percent of deaths from COPD among U.S. women. The risk of COPD is directly related to the amount and duration of cigarette use.³⁰
- 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.^{31,32} 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.³³
- Women smokers have a greater risk for hip fracture than their non-smoking counterparts.³⁴
- Women who smoke are more likely to have menstrual problems including painful periods, irregular bleeding, missed periods, and early onset of menopause.³⁵
- 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.³⁶
- Male and female smokers increase their risk of death from bronchitis and emphysema by nearly 10 times.³⁷

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.³⁸
- 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.³⁹

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- ¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Cigarette Smoking Among Adults – United States, 2007," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 57(45), November 14, 2008 <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5745.pdf>; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States, 2007," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, June 6, 2008 57 SS-4 <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss5704.pdf>
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- ⁴ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Annual Smoking-Attributable Mortality, Years of Potential Life Lost, and Productivity Losses – United States, 2000-2004," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 57 (45), November 14, 2008. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5745.pdf>
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- ⁸ 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.
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- ¹² HHS, *The health consequences of involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke: A report of the Surgeon General*, Atlanta, GA: HHS, CDC, Coordinating Center for Health Promotion, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2006, <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/secondhandsmoke/report/>.
- ¹³ US Mortality Public Use Data Tapes 1960-2003, US Mortality Volumes 1930-1959, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006. See also, American Cancer Society, Cancer Facts and Figures, 2008, <http://www.cancer.org/downloads/STT/2008CAFFfinalsecured.pdf>
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