

SMOKING and THE SPINE

Smoking and the use of tobacco products (including cigarettes, pipes, cigars, and chewing tobacco) effects the health of more than 25 million people in the United States. Most smokers began at an early age, many during the teenage years. Nearly 1 in every 5 deaths are associated with use of tobacco products (CDC fact sheet).

Many people know that smoking can effect such conditions as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung problems (including asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, pneumonia, allergies, etc) and many types of cancer.

But did you know that smoking also causes:

- skin wrinkles
- yellow teeth, tooth decay, tooth infections, bad breath,
- bad smelling clothes and hair
- mouth and tongue cancer
- face, head and neck cancer
- kidney damage
- increased risk for stroke
- increased risk for blood clots in the legs or lungs
- decreased sexual function
- increased risk for low birth weight baby
- increased risk for miscarriage, risk for pre-term labor, stillbirth,
- infertility (inability to have a baby)
- decreased athletic function,
- increased risk for brain aneurysm (weakness of the blood vessels in the brain which can burst and can cause death)
- osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) causing the bones to become more fragile
- Osteopenia (decreased bone thickness)
- peripheral vascular disease (problems with the blood circulation to the legs and feet),
- increased allergies and reactions to allergic triggers such as dogs, cats, mold, pollen
- Alters the immune system, resulting in more colds and longer time recovering from a cold
- pneumonia
- bronchitis
- stomach problems such as ulcers and gastric reflux.
- Decreased absorption of nutrients (vitamins and minerals) from what you eat

What many people don't know is that smoking also effects the structures and health of the spine.

- Use of tobacco products increases the risk of osteoporosis. This causes thinning of the bones and can lead to fractures
- Smoking decreases oxygen in the blood, and increases the level of carbon monoxide. This robs the disks (shock absorbers between the vertebrae) of oxygen and leads to drying out of the discs.
- Smokers have a higher rate of degenerative (arthritic or age-related) changes in the spine than those persons of the same age who do not smoke
- People who smoke have 3 times the risk of wound infections after surgery
- If a spinal fusion is done (on the neck or low back), smokers have up to 47% chance the fusion will not heal
- Smokers have increased risk of complications from surgery and anesthesia, such as pneumonia, and heart problems.

Many surgeons will not perform surgery- especially a fusion- if you smoke. It takes about 3 months for the effects of tobacco products to be fully cleared from the body. In addition, patients who stay tobacco – free for 6 months following surgery may be able to have the same chance of good surgical results as those who have never smoked. A urine or blood test can be done to determine if the effects of nicotine have cleared from the body.

Smoking is one of the health risk factors that you can control. Although there are no studies that prove that the effects of smoking on your spine can be reversed when you stop, there is evidence to support that the bad effects may slow down when you stop smoking.

Here are some tips for quitting:

- Pick a day that you will quit, and stick to it
- Many people find it easier to quit cold-turkey, and just throw away the cigarettes, while others prefer to wean off. Whatever works for you, stick to it and set reasonable goals
- Quit with a buddy. If you stop smoking, but are surrounded by others who continue to smoke, the chances you will start again are higher. Choose a friend or family member to quit with you.
- If your spouse smokes, ask that he/she does not smoke around you, or join you in quitting.
- Put away or throw away your ashtrays
- Try to identify the routines that make you want to smoke. For example, if you have a cigarette with your first cup of coffee in the morning, change your routine. Have your coffee outside or in a different room. If you have a cigar after dinner, take a walk instead
- Chew gum or mints instead of chewing tobacco or smoking

- Take up a hobby- build a birdhouse, throw a ball with your children, go fishing, play with the dog, plant a garden, work in the yard, wash the car
- Take a walk
- Read a good book
- Place the money that you would spend on a pack of cigarettes (or other tobacco products) in a jar. You will be surprised at how much money you have saved by the end of the month. Reward yourself by going to a movie, go out to lunch or save for a special treat.

YOU CAN STOP- TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR SPINE HEALTH TODAY

For more information, visit these helpful web sites:

<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/factsheets>

<http://www.spineuniverse.com>

<http://quitsmoking.about.com>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/smoking.html>

<http://www.becomeanx.org>

<http://www.smoking-cessation.org/>

<http://www.webmd.com/smoking-cessation/>

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

National Cancer Institute

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

American Lung Association

American Cancer Society

National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids

North American Spine Society