

Smoking – some facts

Tobacco was introduced to Europe at the end of the fifteenth century and was initially regarded as having medicinal value. After the Second World War, the dangers of smoking became apparent. Currently some 12 million adults in the UK smoke cigarettes of which 28% are men and 24% are women.

Smoking is highest amongst the age group 20-24: 38% men and 34% women and lowest amongst the age group 60 and over: 15%.

More than 80% of smokers start smoking as teenagers.

Sadly, every year, around 114,000 smokers in the UK die as a result of their habit, this also equates to thirty percent of all cancer deaths, 17% of all heart disease deaths and 80% of deaths from bronchitis and emphysema.

Cancers other than lung cancer which are linked to smoking include:

Cervical cancer, cancer of the pancreas, cancer of the kidney, liver cancer, cancers of the mouth, lip and throat, bladder cancer and leukaemia.

Tobacco smoke contains over 4000 chemical compounds, mainly gases and as tiny particles. These include nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide.

Nicotine: is addictive, stimulates the central nervous system, which increases the heartbeat rate and blood pressure. In large quantities nicotine is poisonous.

Tar: is brown and looks like treacle, consists of tiny particles and is formed when tobacco smoke condenses. Tar is deposited in the lungs and respiratory system and is gradually absorbed.

Monoxide: this binds to haemoglobin (oxygen carrier) in the bloodstream more easily than oxygen does, thus making the blood carry less oxygen round the body.

Our government earns many billions in revenue from tobacco duty excluding VAT. Considerably less is spent on anti-smoking education campaigns and on efforts to help people stop smoking.

Those who smoke between 1 and 14 cigarettes a day have eight times the risk of dying from lung cancer compared to non-smokers and if you smoke more than 25 cigarettes a day you will have 25 times the risk compared to non-smokers.

Smoking also affects other aspects of our health:

Smoking can lead to an earlier menopause. Women who smoke reach their menopause up to 2 years earlier than non-smokers and are at greater risk of developing osteoporosis.

Sperm abnormalities and impotence are associated with smoking.

It is no new news that smoking during pregnancy spells disaster. It leads to an increased risk of spontaneous abortion, bleeding during pregnancy, premature births, low weight of babies at birth and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Smoking pipes and cigars is no better than cigarettes and the risks are just as great.

This is the bad news about smoking. Whilst many of us enjoy the habit, unfortunately there is no good news!