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Can your body heal from smoking

By Dianne DixonUpdated: Feb 5, 2020According to the World Health Organization, tobacco kills more than seven million smokers and 1.2 million non-smokers, including children, each year. For decades, health professionals have been strengthening the connections between this habit and respiratory diseases, certain types of cancer, and other illnesses. Life-threatening conditions are not the only possibilities, though. The effects of smoking are more dangerous to the entire body than many realize, especially since there are thousands of chemicals in a single cigarette. Bronchitis is inflammation of the airways leading to increased mucus production. Smoker's cough is a wet cough caused by this kind of inflammation. Under normal circumstances, airway lining cells continuously die and regenerate. Experts have learned, however, that smoking halts this process by suppressing BIK, a protein that causes natural cell death. Too little of this protein means airway cells overproduce mucus and the airway. PeopleImages / Getty Images For some, cigarettes are a response to stress and anxiety, and they may even help reduce it. However, research suggests smoking may cause mood disorders, including incidents of panic attacks. According to doctors, smoking alters the microstructural integrity of the brain’s white matter in the prefrontal cortices, which could impact its ability to process anxiety. It also reduces the gray matter in the cerebellum and other areas that affect emotions. wundervisuals / Getty Images Early menopause occurs in women younger than 45 years and is associated with increased risks of several conditions, including cognitive dysfunction and osteoporosis. One study tested women around 35 years of age, whose smoking habits ranged from light to heavy before and during the tests. Doctors found that those who continued smoking through age 35 had the highest risk of early menopause, while heavy smokers who quit by the same age had a smaller, but still significant, risk. Scientists believe that nicotine and polycyclic hydrocarbons exhibit toxic effects on levels of serum estrogen and ovarian follicles. Defensive products, such as T cells and B cells, protect the body from infection. Smokers and people exposed to secondhand smoke have increased susceptibility to bacterial infections, such as vaginosis and meningitis, because the chemicals in the cigarette compromise immune function. Smokers are also more vulnerable to gastrointestinal conditions caused by Heliobacter pylori, which is associated with ulcers, and smoking renders treatments for the germ far less effective. Hiraman / Getty Images When the eyewall, known as the uvea, becomes inflamed, it triggers a condition called uveitis. Redness and blurred vision in one or both eyes may occur, but this disease progresses quickly and can result in complete blindness. Studies show that smokers are more than twice as likely as non-smokers to develop uveitis, but the percentage is much greater when it comes to infectious uveitis brought on by bacteria, viruses, or parasites. malija / Getty Images In the U.S., between 10 and 15 percent of pregnancies end in miscarriages within the first trimester. Women who smoke not only face problems getting pregnant but have a higher risk of miscarriage during those initial months. Some research suggests that the risk of miscarriage increases by one percent for every cigarette smoked per day. Pregnant women who didn’t smoke, but were exposed to secondhand smoke, had an 11 percent miscarriage risk. Motortion / Getty Images Ectopic pregnancies occur when the embryo implants itself in the fallopian tubes or somewhere else outside of the womb. In women who smoke, tests show that cotinine, a byproduct of nicotine, alters the expression of prokineticin receptor-1, PROKR1, a protein essential for embryo implantation. Doctors believe that cotinine increases protein levels in the fallopian tubes, leading to this life-threatening development. MedicalArtInc / Getty Images According to the CDC, approximately seven percent of women smoke during pregnancy, which increases the newborn’s risk of viral and bacterial infections. This infection risk is related to babies dying from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or SIDS. Studies show that smoking mothers have lower IL-10 anti-inflammatory responses against bacteria and interferon protein responses against viruses. This means that bacteria more easily bind to mucous, leading to more infantile infections and increased SIDS risk. chameleonseye / Getty Images Smoking, active and secondhand, makes blood platelets stick together, increasing the risk of unwanted blood clots. It also damages the blood vessel lining, which prompts clot formation and increases the risk of a coronary or pulmonary event. Research indicates that nicotine changes the relationship between plasma, fibrinogen, and the procoagulant enzyme thrombin, which alters the formation properties of the clots. iLexx / Getty Images In an evaluation of smokers and non-smokers with noninsulin-dependent diabetes, researchers found that the process of glucose disposal — the uptake of glucose by the muscle cells — was nearly 50 percent lower in smokers than in nonsmokers. The impairment in insulin action was related to the heightened levels of plasma insulin and triglycerides. This shows that smoking makes insulin resistance worse, and may eventually lead to related cardiovascular health complications, such as atherosclerosis. designer491 / Getty Images Medically reviewed by Deborah Weatherspoon, Ph.D., R.N., CRNA — Written by Mary Sweeney, RN, BSN, CEN, ONN-CG-T on May 26, 2020Share on PinterestIf you’ve recently quit smoking, you’ve taken an important first step toward taking control of your health. If you’re considering quitting, you may be wondering what the benefits are. Whatever group you fall into, there’s a common concern: Can you clean your lungs after you quit smoking?While there’s no quick fix to get your lungs back to the way they were before you started smoking, there are things you can do to help your lungs repair themselves after you smoke your last cigarette. Let’s take a look at some of the ways you can help your lungs “self-clean.”Once you’ve quit smoking, you may have the urge to “clean” your lungs to get rid of the toxins that have built up.Fortunately, your lungs are self-cleaning. They begin that process after you smoke your last cigarette.Your lungs are a remarkable organ system that, in some instances, have the ability to repair themselves over time. After quitting smoking, your lungs begin to slowly heal and regenerate. The speed at which they heal all depends on how long you smoked and how much damage is present.Smoking causes two different kinds of permanent damage to your lungs:Emphysema. In emphysema, the small air sacs in the lungs, called alveoli, are destroyed, which decreases the lungs’ surface area. The lungs then aren’t able to exchange oxygen that your body needs. Chronic bronchitis. With chronic bronchitis, the smaller airways leading to alveoli become inflamed, which prevents oxygen from reaching the alveoli. Together, these conditions are known as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). While there’s no way to reverse scarring or lung damage that years of smoking can cause, there are things you can do to prevent further damage and improve your lung health.CoughingAccording to Dr. Keith Mortman, chief of thoracic surgery at the George Washington Medical Faculty Associates in Washington, D.C., a smoker is likely to have a lot of mucus built up in their lungs. This buildup may persist after quitting. Coughing works by helping your body get rid of that extra mucus, unblocking those smaller airways and opening them up to get oxygen.ExerciseMortman also emphasizes the importance of physical activity. Staying active can be one of the best things you can do to maintain and improve your lung function. Simply going for a walk outside can help those air sacs in your lungs stay open. If those sacs stay open, they’re able to exchange oxygen and get it where your body needs it.Avoid pollutantsThis may seem like a no-brainer, but avoiding secondhand smoke, dust, mold, and chemicals will encourage healthy lung function. Animal studies have found that exposure to filtered air decreases mucus production in the lungs. Mucus can block those smaller airways and make it harder to get oxygen. Before spending time outside, check your local weather station for air quality reports. If it’s a “bad air day,” try to avoid spending lots of time outside.Drink warm fluidsAccording to the American Lung Association, staying hydrated is important for lung health. By drinking 64 ounces of water per day (eight 8-ounce cups), you’re keeping any mucus in your lungs thin, which makes it easier to get rid of when you cough. Drinking warm beverages, like tea, broth, or even just hot water, may cause thinning of mucus, making it easier to clear from your airways.Drink green teaResearch has shown that green tea has anti-inflammatory properties that may prevent some types of lung disease. In a 2018 study, participants who consumed green tea two or more times per day were less likely to develop COPD. Try some steamSteam therapy involves inhaling water vapor to thin out mucus and reduce inflammation in the airways. A 2018 study showed that in a small group of COPD patients, the use of a steam mask significantly improved their breathing. It’s important to note that although this group of patients had immediate relief of symptoms, they didn’t see any change in their overall lung health after stopping the steam.Eat anti-inflammatory foodsA smoker’s lung are likely to be inflamed, which can make it difficult to breathe. While there’s no scientific evidence to show that eating a diet high in anti-inflammatory foods will prevent lung inflammation, research has shown that it may reduce inflammation in the body. In other words, eating anti-inflammatory foods can’t hurt. Anti-inflammatory foods include:blueberriescherriesspinachkaleolivesalmondsFinding help to quit smokingMaking the decision to quit smoking is an important first step toward taking control of your health. Remember, you’re not alone! Reach out to these resources for support:First, let’s talk about how the lungs work. When you inhale, air travels into your airway (trachea), which then splits into two airways, called bronchi, that each lead to one of your lungs. Those bronchi then split into smaller airways called bronchioles, which are the smallest airways in your lungs. At the end of each of those bronchioles are small air sacs called alveoli.When you smoke, you inhale about 600 different compounds. These compounds can be broken down into several thousand chemicals, many of which are known to cause cancer.Cigarette smoke can affect every system in your body. Here are some examples:Heart. Blood vessels become narrower, making it harder for blood to circulate oxygen to the rest of your body. This makes your heart work harder.Brain. Nicotine withdrawal can make you feel tired and unable to concentrate.Respiratory system. Lungs can become inflamed and congested, making it hard to breathe.Reproductive system. Over time, smoking can cause infertility and decreased sexual drive.People who smoke run a higher risk for developing many chronic diseases, including:heart diseasediabeteshigh blood pressurecertain cancersCOPDThese and other smoking-related diseases can have a pretty big impact on your life expectancy and quality of life. Here’s a breakdown of what happens after you have your last cigarette.What happens when you quit smokingDeciding to quit smoking is one of the most important (and best!) decisions you’ll ever make. Once you’ve finished your last cigarette, your lungs begin working to clean themselves. Quitting smoking is very difficult, but you got this.While there’s no one surefire way to clean out your lungs after you quit smoking, there are things you can do to promote lung health. Last medically reviewed on May 26, 2020

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