

Smoking – even occasionally – can damage your heart

This deadly habit harms nearly every organ in the body: including the lungs, eyes, mouth, reproductive organs, bones, bladder and digestive organs. It can have a terrible effect on the heart and blood vessels.

The chemicals in tobacco smoke damage the structure of your blood vessels. This increases your risk of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), which can lead to coronary heart disease, chest pain, heart attack, heart failure, arrhythmia or even death.

Smoking is a major risk factor for peripheral arterial disease. This is a condition in which plaque builds up in the arteries that carry blood to the head, organs and limbs.

Even light smoking or occasional smoking damages the heart and blood vessels. For some people, such as women who use birth control pills and people who have diabetes, smoking poses an even greater risk.

Secondhand smoke also can harm the heart and blood vessels, and increases adults' risk of heart attack and death. It places children and teens at a greater risk for future heart disease and is especially harmful to children with asthma and premature babies with respiratory distress syndrome.

Benefits of quitting smoking and avoiding secondhand smoke

Of course, one of the best ways to reduce your risk of heart disease is to avoid tobacco smoke. If you already smoke, quitting will reduce your risk of developing and dying from heart disease. And over time, quitting also will lower your risk of atherosclerosis and blood clots.

Quitting smoking is possible, but it can be hard. Talk to your doctor about the many options available for smoking cessation.

It could be the single most important step you take for your heart.

Source: Adapted from: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, How Does Smoking Affect the Heart and Blood Vessels?, nhlbi.nih.gov, (accessed October 2015).

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