

# Smoking and Asthma



Did you know that smoking cigarettes can make your asthma worse? Smoking cigarettes can harm almost every organ in your body. Smoking has been linked to lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), stroke, and heart disease. Smoking can cause a blockage in your heart and blood vessels that reduces blood flow to your skin and legs. It can also damage your airways and the small air sacs (alveoli) in your lungs.

Tobacco smoke and secondhand smoke are asthma triggers. They are very unhealthy for people diagnosed with asthma. People with asthma who smoke cigarettes have worse symptoms than those who don't. They are also more likely to be seen in emergency departments of hospitals because of asthma attacks. You have lots of good reasons never to start smoking or to quit smoking if you already smoke.

## Effect on airways

When you have asthma, air tubes (bronchial tubes) in your lungs react to things that bother them. These tubes swell, squeeze tighter, and make mucus. It's harder for air to get through the narrowed tubes. That's why you have trouble breathing during an asthma attack. Cigarette smoke can set off this reaction. Breathing in the smoke can make you cough, wheeze, and feel short of breath.

## Other effects of smoking

You might think you can stop smoking whenever you want. But it's not that easy. Cigarettes contain nicotine. Nicotine is a powerful drug. You can become addicted to it. And that can make it hard to stop smoking. Besides nicotine, cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals. Many of them are poisonous. And 69 of these chemicals have been linked to cancer.

If you quit, you will have fewer symptoms and flare-ups. You will also have less need for medicine, healthcare provider and emergency room visits, and hospital stays. And fewer missed work or school days. You will have more symptom-free days to do the activities you enjoy.

Here are more reasons to not smoke cigarettes:

- **Smoking spoils sports.** Smoking makes it hard for oxygen to get to your muscles. This can affect how well you do in sports. People who smoke may run slower than nonsmokers. And they may be unable to run as far.
- **Smoking harms your health.** It damages your blood vessels by making them hard or stiff and less able to stretch. Your arteries also narrow due to plaque buildup. This makes your heart work harder because its blood flow is decreased. Smoking can cause lung disease, heart disease, and stroke.
- **Smoking causes cancer.** Smoking causes many types of cancer. It has been linked to cancer in the blood, bladder, cervix, colon, rectum, esophagus, kidney, larynx, liver, mouth, throat, pancreas, stomach, trachea, lung, and lung airways (bronchi).
- **Smoking causes sickness.** You're more likely to catch colds and the flu if you smoke. And it may take longer to get better when you're sick.
- **Smoking dulls your senses.** It makes it hard to taste and smell things. You won't enjoy your favorite foods as much.
- **Smoking costs money.** Don't let your money—and your health—go up in smoke. Make your body a smoke-free zone!
- **Smoking puts others at risk.** Secondhand smoke is smoke created by a smoker and breathed in by a second person. Secondhand smoke can set off an asthma attack. It can also cause lung cancer in nonsmoking adults. Also, inhaling secondhand smoke:
  - Causes disease and premature death in nonsmoking adults and children

- Irritates the airways and has harmful effects right away on a person's heart and blood vessels. In the U.S. it increases the risk for heart disease by about 25% to 30%. And it causes about 34,000 deaths from heart disease each year.
- Increases the risk for stroke by 20% to 30%
- Puts pregnant women at increased risk of having a baby with lower birth weight
- Puts children at an increased risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), ear infections, colds, pneumonia, and bronchitis. It also creates more frequent and more severe asthma symptoms among children who have asthma.
- Slows the growth of children's lungs and can cause them to cough, wheeze, and feel breathless

## **Make a plan to quit**

Quitting smoking is difficult. But there are things that can make it easier. You can do it!

- Talk with your healthcare provider for support. They may prescribe medicine to help you quit.
- You can join a support group online or in person.
- Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or visit [smokefree.gov/](https://smokefree.gov/)

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