

SMOKING: Let's CLEAR the Air

TV and radio newscasts emit threatening warnings about the hazards of cigarettes. Magazines, newspapers, and numerous pamphlets deliver the ominous facts. Doctors, nurses, teachers, and many others join the crusade against smoking.

Why then are as many as 4,600,000 teenagers continuing to smoke cigarettes? And why do almost a million teens still take up the habit each year, fully aware of the dangers? A defiance of authority? A desire to appear more grown-up? These factors may be part of the reason. However, there is evidence today that the real reasons teens smoke may be more elusive.

For instance, in spite of all the talk about the dangers of smoking and antismoking messages in the mass media, a general acceptance of the smoking habit persists in our society. Parents, teachers, and professionals in all fields often voice opinions against smoking, yet set a poor example. The highest percentage of teenagers who smoke come from families where one or both parents smoke. A large percentage of teens smoke with their parents' knowledge, some with their parents' consent. Many teens report that their schools now have smoking lounges.

A recent study conducted for the American Cancer Society by the Yankelovich, Skelly, and White public-opinion research firm explored cigarette smoking among teenage girls and young women. The startling results — the percentage of smokers among teenage girls increased from 22 percent in 1969 to 27 percent today. Additionally, in 1969 one out of ten teenage girl smokers smoked a pack or more a day; now, four out of ten do. The study cites "an all pervasive smoking environment" as a major reason for the increase. Although the study centered on teenage girls, perhaps some of the results bring the entire smoking picture for males and females into a clearer light.

According to the survey, the teen environment and "their own perceptions of who and how many people

smoke more than counterbalances the impact of what they have seen, heard, or read about the dangers."

What about the situation around them? Other than the reinforcement from adults and some schools, authorities cite the change in society's values as a stimulus.

Today there is an emphasis on self-fulfillment, the rights of the individual, "doing your own thing," and the emotional rather than the rational. Our society has also become more tolerant toward the use of drugs in general. These factors, combined with the teenagers' traditional defiance of authority and dislike of being told what to do, are thought to have caused the upsurge of girls' smoking.

The most alarming finding of the study has serious implications. The study found that 83 percent of all teenage girls think that most teenagers are smokers. The fact is that only 15 percent really are. Why this impression that "everybody" smokes? Part of it may be due to peer pressure and the influence of parents who smoke. But it may also be created, at least in part, by cigarette advertising. An advertisement showing chic, healthy, secure, good-looking men and women in a country or active setting, puffing away on a cigarette, is a most persuasive argument for smoking, especially to the teenager who is still unsure of who he or she really is. If ads are having this effect, we need to make teens more aware of these influencing factors. We also need to provide them with the kind of knowledge they need to make an informed decision.

THE FACTS ABOUT SMOKING AND THE BODY

Following, for easy reference, is a list of the detrimental effects of cigarette smoking, according to the American Cancer Society:

1. Cigarette smoke paralyzes the cilia (tiny hairs lining the bronchial tubes) which act like little brooms to sweep dirt and germs from the lungs. This makes the smoker more prone to all kinds of infection.

2. An estimated 80 percent of all lung cancers are caused by smoking. The risk of lung cancer increases with the amount of cigarettes smoked and the number of years a person has smoked. Only five percent of lung cancer victims can be saved—that's one patient in 20. And, the death rate from lung cancer for cigarette smokers is 10 times that of nonsmokers.

3. Smoking also causes cancer of the larynx, mouth, esophagus, and urinary bladder. There are 30 known carcinogens in cigarette smoke.

4. Smoking causes a higher death rate from circulatory diseases, heart attacks, and strokes. Male smokers between the ages of 45 and 54 have more than three times the death rate from heart attacks than nonsmokers.

5. Chronic bronchitis and emphysema (often found together) are lung diseases of which most cases are caused by cigarette smoke. Chronic bronchitis is a persistent excessive mucus secretion of the bronchial tree, causing a chronic cough. Emphysema is a disease in which the lungs lose their elasticity and hold in too much air, causing an agonizing difficulty in breathing and in some cases death.

6. Smoking is a special hazard for women during pregnancy. Women who smoke during their pregnancies have a higher number of stillbirths and smaller babies than nonsmokers.

7. Just one cigarette has the following effects on the body:

- increases blood pressure
- speeds up the heartbeat
- upsets the flow of blood and air in the lungs
- lowers the temperature of the skin.

8. In addition, the National Fire Protection Association linked 107,200 building fires to smoking or to matches used in smoking in 1970.

TEACHING ABOUT SMOKING

Tackling the subject of smoking can be a difficult one, especially if there are many smokers in the class. Expect some resistance from confirmed smokers. Of great help will be an article in the May/June 1976 issue of CO-ED entitled "Do You Really Want