

Cigars vs. Cigarettes: Which is worse for Your Health?

Most everyone has heard about the health risks of smoking both cigars and cigarettes, and the dangers of secondhand smoke. But which is worse? Do cigar smokers really have the advantage over cigarettes smokers? The answer is much more complicated than anyone ever thought.

A Matter of Degree

Research from the National Cancer Institute indicates that the health risks posed by both cigarettes and cigars are strongly linked to frequency of use. That is, it's not whether you smoke cigarettes or cigars, but how much and how often you consume them. Individuals who smoke cigarettes on a daily basis are at a greater risk of developing cancer than people who smoke the occasional cigar. That said, evidence indicates that cigars contain many more carcinogens than cigarettes. It also appears that cigar smoke is more toxic than cigarette secondhand smoke. Much of this is due to the fact that cigars are bigger than cigarettes, and thus produce more smoke.

To Inhale or Not?

Debate has also concentrated on the issue of inhaling nicotine from cigars and cigarettes. Dedicated cigar enthusiasts argue that cigars are less dangerous than cigarettes because they don't require you to inhale as much toxins. The National Cancer Institute's research indicates that both cigar and cigarette smokers are exposed to carcinogens, regardless of whether they inhale or not. Even without inhaling, smokers are still exposing their mouths, tongues, larynxes, and throats to carcinogens. In fact, simply holding an unlit cigar or cigarette between your lips can expose you to carcinogens. Furthermore, when saliva comes in contact with a cigar or cigarette, even momentarily, carcinogens are swallowed. When carcinogens are swallowed, the throat, larynx, and esophagus further become exposed to these toxins and irritants. Cigarette and cigar smokers appear to swallow similar amounts of carcinogens, resulting in approximately the same percentage of risk in developing oral and esophageal cancers.

Research indicates that the health risks associated with both cigars and cigarettes may be reduced if the degree inhalation is adjusted. Because most cigarette smokers tend to inhale deeply and smoke on a regular basis, they are at higher risk of developing cancer of the larynx. To get an idea of how inhalation of smoke relates to health risks, the National Cancer Institute tells us that the lung cancer risk of someone who smokes five cigars a day and inhales moderately has about the same risk as someone who smokes one pack of

cigarettes a day.

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