



Women and Lung Cancer: News You Can Use

Teenage girls do it to look sophisticated. Harried women do it to relieve stress or to keep their weight down. Women start smoking for many different reasons, but the consequences of cigarette use are devastatingly similar—what the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General calls a “full-blown epidemic” of smoking-related diseases among women.

Since 1950, the number of women who die of lung cancer each year has increased 600%, according to a 2001 Surgeon General’s report on “Women and Smoking.” More than 22 million women and 1.5 million adolescent girls in the United States smoke cigarettes, and the number of smokers is increasing the fastest among girls in middle school and high school.

More women die of lung cancer than of any other type of cancer, including breast cancer. Every year, about 68,000 women die of the disease, and smoking, according to the American Cancer Society (ACS), is to blame for about 80% of these lung cancer deaths. The ACS estimates that 80,100 new cases of lung cancer will be diagnosed in women during 2003.

A woman doesn’t have to smoke to be harmed by tobacco. A nonsmoker who breathes in other people’s smoke also has an increased risk of lung cancer. A nonsmoker who is married to someone who smokes, for instance, has a 30% greater risk of lung cancer than the spouse of a nonsmoker.

The good news is that stopping smoking can significantly reduce a woman’s chance of getting lung cancer. In a report published in the *British Medical Journal* in 2000, a group of British epidemiologists found that the risk of lung cancer was lowered by one third in smokers who had quit smoking less than ten years earlier. For those who quit smoking more than 30 years ago, the risk of getting lung cancer was only 10% what it would have been had they continued to smoke.

THE BAD NEWS:

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THE GOOD NEWS:

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What Women Can Do to Protect Themselves from Lung Cancer

- **Stop smoking.** Many health agencies offer smoking cessation programs. Nicotine replacement products, which provide small, steady doses of nicotine to relieve withdrawal symptoms, have helped some smokers to quit. These products come in the form of patches, gum, nasal spray, and inhalers. (Combining the nicotine patch with the gum or nasal spray has been shown to increase long-term success rates over using only one nicotine replacement method.) Also, your doctor may be able to prescribe a medication that will help curb your urge to smoke.
- **Try again to stop.** Many smokers have a hard time quitting. Studies have shown that it may take two or three attempts before they can stop for good. The repeat effort is worth it. People who stop smoking for three months often remain cigarette-free for the rest of their lives, according to the National Cancer Institute.
- **Avoid breathing other people’s smoke.**
- **Get more information.** The Cancer Information Service (1-800-4-CANCER) can provide you with free literature about lung cancer or stopping smoking. ●

For more information, contact your physician or contact the M. D. Anderson Information Line:

☎ (800) 392-1611 within the United States, or

☎ (713) 792-6161 in Houston and outside the United States.

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