

How smoking affects your lungs

WE all know smoking can damage our lungs, but do you know why? Finding out the facts can help to motivate you, your friends and your family to try to stop smoking.

Giving up smoking is never easy, but it is the most important thing you can do to look after your health and there is plenty of help available.

Smoking cigarettes is harmful to you and to those around you. It can lead to a wide range of diseases and disorders including:

Cigarettes and other types of tobacco products contain nicotine which is very addictive. Tobacco smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, including more than 70 cancer-causing chemicals and hundreds of other poisons.

It is mostly the harmful chemicals that cause illness and death, and not the nicotine. It is the nicotine, however, which creates an addiction or 'craving'.

Smoking damages the air sacs and airways in your lungs. It also causes damage to blood vessels and raises your heart rate and blood pressure, which puts you at risk of heart disease and stroke.

Smoking also affects the

reproductive system and sex organs.

Men can have difficulty getting an erection and it can reduce sperm count. Women who smoke are at a greater risk of developing breast and cervical cancer, and may have difficulties getting pregnant. Smoking whilst pregnant puts you at risk of miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight and even stillbirth.

Smoking is the biggest cause of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) – an umbrella term for a range of conditions including emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

It causes damage to the airways and lungs which leads to the development of this long-term condition. Smoking can also make symptoms worse for people with asthma and other lung conditions.

Stopping smoking is essential to prevent the development of COPD or slow down its progression.

How does passive smoking affect my health?

Passive smoking is when you breathe in the smoke that comes from someone else's cigarette. It is now known that smoking not only causes harm to people who smoke, but is also harmful to others around them who are exposed

to second-hand smoke. In the UK alone, it is estimated that more than 10,000 people die from diseases caused by passive smoking every year.

Passive smoking can increase your risk of cancer and other health problems, and is particularly dangerous to children.

Children and babies who are exposed to second-hand smoke are more likely to develop lung problems such as asthma, and are at risk of developing infections including pneumonia, bronchitis and ear infections. This is because their lungs are not yet fully formed.

If you smoke, your baby is at greater risk of cot death, also known as sudden infant death syndrome. Smoking in cars when children are present also increases the risk of damaging their health.

Smoking in a small space like a car means the exposure to smoke is increased significantly, and opening a window makes little difference. The British Lung Foundation has been campaigning to ban smoking in cars when children are present.

Smoking tobacco is the biggest avoidable cause of death. It is never too late to stop smoking, no matter how long you have smoked for.