



One Person Dies Every Six Seconds!

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According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) "Trinidad and Tobago accounts for more than 21 percent of the region's smokers, the highest in the Caribbean," and TT has the "fourth highest smoking rate in the 13-15 age group in the region."

In the Caribbean, from 15%- 49% of young males may be addicted to smoking, the second largest preventable cause of disease and premature death. Teens who think that smoking is "cool" because of peer-pressure, advertisements, or films, become addicted to smoking as teens with lifelong consequences for themselves as adults, and for society. Tobacco is a difficult addiction to fight, and the earlier one starts smoking, the harder it is to quit.

Nicotine is as Addictive as Heroin

After a study of more than 2000 smokers in Australia, Dr. Raymond Seidler of South Wales Australia, concluded, "What smokers don't realise is that nicotine addiction is as powerful, or even more powerful, than heroin addiction," he said. "The [brain's] receptors for smoking are as strongly attached to nicotine as the heroine receptor is to opiates. ...Quitting is therefore a serious challenge for most."

Tobacco Kills One Person Every Second

Trinidad and Tobago was the first in the Caricom region to pass a Tobacco Control Act, which governs the distribution and promotion of tobacco. The Ministry of

Health is concerned that globally, smoking causes 5.4 million deaths a year, and that smoking is a major factor in the chronic diseases that affect citizens of Trinidad and Tobago such as cancers, stroke, heart and lung disease.

Tobacco smoke contains more than 7000 chemicals. At least 250 are harmful, and 69 are known to cause cancer in both smokers, and those inhaling their second-hand smoke. Inhaled smoke, with its noxious particles and gases, damages blood vessels and lung tissue, and activates inflammatory and other immune responses. It may also be a contributor to abnormal immune responses during which the body destroys its own healthy tissue (i.e., autoimmune responses).

Smoking is associated with high levels of inflammation, and uncontrolled inflammation is the hallmark of most disease. For example, long-term smokers have increased levels of inflammation, and higher levels of atherosclerosis, clogging of arteries. After a person stops smoking, their levels of inflammation gradually decrease, along with their cardiovascular risk for disease.

Tobacco users die 15 years earlier than those that do not smoke, with tobacco killing one person, every six seconds. Thirty to fifty percent of people on tobacco will die from its harmful effects. In addition, female smokers are at 25% more likely to develop heart disease and complications than male smokers, and at an earlier age than males.

Decreasing Disease Risk

Smokers' risk of cancers of the lung, esophagus, voice box, mouth, stomach, and blood (for example leukemia) are reduced when they quit smoking. Also individuals that have reduced or completely stopped smoking, have lower rates of stroke, heart disease, and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) than smokers.

Smokers inhale four times the amount of carbon monoxide found in car exhaust. Smokers therefore have higher levels of carbon monoxide in their blood, which displaces the oxygen in their red blood cells, decreasing the ability of their blood to carry oxygen throughout the body and to the brain.

The smoke from one pack of cigarettes can raise the carbon monoxide concentration in a home to twice the safety limits for outdoor air. Within a few hours of quitting tobacco, their carbon monoxide levels begin to decline. Higher blood pressures and heart rates start to return to normal and within a few weeks people will cough and wheeze less, produce less phlegm, and have improved circulation.

People who have their first cigarette within 30 minutes of getting up in the morning are 79% more likely to develop cancer than those who light up later, regardless of the number of cigarettes they have during the rest of the day.

Exercise May Make a Difference

Exercise helps the body reduce inflammation and its accompanying stress. Smokers who exercise regularly are twice as successful quitting smoking than smokers who do not exercise. The more that one exercises, the higher their quit-smoking success. The greater their level of activity, the more likely they are to quit.

Teenage boys who combine exercise with anti-smoking lectures are more likely to quit smoking than those who only take anti-smoking classes. At six months 37% of the boys reported they had quit smoking compared to 18% of those boys not involved in exercise.

The Sooner The Better

Smoking is such a serious assault on health, that regardless of age individuals that quit smoking are less likely to die from smoking-related illnesses. So for example, if you are 30 years of age and quit tobacco use, your chance of dying prematurely declines by more than 90%. Quitting at 50 years of age reduces the risk of dying prematurely by 50%, and those quitting at 60 years of age live longer and have a better quality of life than those that do not stop smoking. More importantly however, no matter what the age, long-term, survival and life are enhanced significantly when people stop smoking.

Comments and questions are welcomed at DrHellen@DrHellenGreenblatt.info