

HEALTHY MINDS
A WEEKLY COLUMN ALL ABOUT MENTAL WELLNESS
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Smoking Makes You Age



I recently re-examined simple charts that were formulated by The Department of Veteran's Affairs Medical Center in a Vermont town, **SMOKING HAS THE SAME EFFECTS ON MORTALITY RISKS AS AGING 10 YEARS.** The tables are used by physicians to give to interested patients, a clearer idea of the effects of smoking on their health. The tables are arranged by age, sex and smoking status and show the risk of dying from various causes in the next 10 years for patients ranging from 35 to 70 years of age. The findings are posted in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute (online).

Death from any cause is higher for men than for women. The 13 causes examined were heart disease, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, AIDS, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, accidents, and various cancers: prostate, lung, colon, breast, cervical, and ovarian. These were examined in smokers and in those who never smoked.

- For non-smoking men over 50, heart disease killed more than lung, colon and prostate cancer combined
- For smokers over 60, lung cancer and heart disease are about the same, and lung cancer for those over 50 were 10 times as prevalent as the other two cancers mentioned.
- For women who have never been smokers, lung cancer and heart disease risks are about the same until age 60 when heart disease becomes the primary killer.
- For smoking women over only 40 years of age, however, the risk of dying of lung cancer or heart disease is greater than the risk of breast cancer.

Overall, the charts are easily understood by patients and clearly show that smoking significantly increases the chance of dying from smoking-linked diseases.

It is suggested that physicians obtain these charts from the American Cancer Society or the Journal of the National Cancer Institute and deliver the message to receptive individuals.

Another method being used in England and gaining popularity here, delivers a simple message to patients how smoking prematurely ages their lungs. Doctors use a simple office-based spirometer, a device that measures the amount of air that you can forcibly blow out in one second.

It is found that patients who are given this information and see that their lungs are indeed aging and losing functionality are more likely to give up smoking. If you damage your

lungs by developing emphysema, please realize that the damage is irreversible – and that means forever.

Consider that the Commonwealth of Kentucky has the nation's greatest per capita number of smokers and also the greatest number of per capita cases of lung cancer. We must not destroy our lives any longer and we must encourage our love ones – with POSITIVE words – to quit. Smokers, you can learn to change your behavior by changing your thinking; this is a key mental wellness issue for us. We shall talk more about techniques for smoking cessation in the near future. If you are interested in being part of a low-cost “quit smoking” group, please let me know by sending me feedback.

TIP OF THE WEEK: Last year a Kentucky man was arrested and charged with felony abuse or neglect of a child because his small child was playing in the backyard for 90 minutes without sunscreen. The child was, fortunately, not harmed by the man's ignorance, but surely the consequences for the father could have been more constructive. When you see such abusive treatment of children occurring is it better to speak out gently but firmly. Be courageous and speak up righteously and with love against abuse of all kinds to young and old alike. Use the Golden Rule towards your neighbors as a first step.

What about an adult who drives around for hours in a sealed, air-conditioned car, chain-smoking and subjecting his passengers, who may be children, to second-hand smoke? Second-hand smoke is even more harmful than first-hand smoke. Some of the worst poisons don't get burned up when the cigarette is burning between puffs. This is abuse, pure and simple, even if you would never intentionally hurt a child. Now we know. Let's educate ourselves and our friends on the harm that this exposure does to children. Grandparents, parents, family members, caregivers: give a child a chance to develop fully and not be poisoned or stunted by living in an environment with air that is proven to hurt that child's health.

WEBSITES OF THE WEEK: <http://www.quitsmoking.com/>;
http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_13X_Guide_for_Quitting_Smoking.asp