

HEALTHY MINDS
A WEEKLY COLUMN ALL ABOUT MENTAL WELLNESS
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Smoking Has The Same Effects on Mortality Risks as Aging 10 Years



According to 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 receptive patients a clearer idea of the effects of smoking on their health. They 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, using a simple office-based spirometer, a device that measures the FEV1 – that is the forced expiratory volume in 1 second – that is 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, no matter what condition or “age” their lungs had deteriorated.

Considering that the Commonwealth of Kentucky has the greatest per capita number of smokers and also of lung cancer, and that smokers can learn to change their behavior

through changing their thinking, this is a key mental wellness issue for us. We shall talk more about smoking cessation in the near future.

TIP OF THE WEEK: Last week 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. Yes, the child was harmed by the man's ignorance, but perhaps the consequences for the father could be more constructive. What about an adult who drives around for hours in a sealed, air-conditioned car, chain-smoking and subjecting those children to second-hand smoke which is even more harmful than first-hand smoke because some of the worst poisons don't get burned up when the cigarette is burning between puffs? Instead of consequences let's educate everyone on the harm that this does. 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 now and in the future. When you see such abusive treatment of children occurring is it better to speak out gently but firmly, or to say nothing. Be courageous and speak up righteously and with love against abuse of all kinds to young and old alike.