

Smoking and Heart Disease

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), cigarette smoking is the single most preventable cause of death in the United States. Cigarettes account for approximately 440,000 of the 2.4 million deaths per year in the U.S. Cigarette smokers have a higher incidence of developing diseases such as cancer, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary (Lung) Disease, and a build-up of fatty deposits in the arteries called atherosclerosis. Development of this atherosclerosis in the coronary arteries (Coronary Heart or Artery Disease) can lead to a heart attack.

There are a number of risk factors for Coronary Artery Disease, some that you can change, some you can not: Cigarette and tobacco smoke, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity, obesity, diabetes, gender, age, and family history. Due to their widespread use, the Surgeon General has called cigarette smoking "the most important of the known modifiable risk factors for coronary heart disease in the United States." Smoking alone is a significant risk factor for Coronary Artery Disease, however when combined with other factors, the risk is increased. Smoking increases blood pressure, decreases exercise tolerance, and increases the risk of blood clots. Smoking also decreases HDL (good) cholesterol, and when combined with a family history of heart disease also seems to greatly increase the risk. Additionally, women who smoke and use oral contraceptives (birth control pills) are at an even greater risk of having a heart attack.

While cigar and pipe smokers are also at a higher risk for death from Coronary Artery Disease, their risk isn't as great as that of cigarette smokers...probably because they are less likely to inhale the smoke. There is less scientific information on the cardiovascular effects of cigar and pipe smoking however, and the best advice is to NOT smoke at all.

There have been several studies listing passive smoking (exposure to "secondhand" or environmental smoke) as a significant health hazard, and linking it to the development of heart and blood vessel disease. Each year, approximately 35,000 nonsmokers per year die of heart disease, probably related to their exposure to "secondhand" smoke.

The best advice is, if you don't smoke...don't start...if you do smoke...QUIT!
Smoking...it's not worth the risk!

Adapted from The American Heart Association (www.americanheart.org)