

Your first puff can leave you **HOOKED**



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You won't die from testing to smoke a cigarette. Right? Right, but you run the risk of soon becoming addicted to its nicotine, and this one-off event could develop into a daily habit where you simply must have that smoke. In fact, two out of three who test smoking become addicted at some period in their life. So, why run the risk of harming yourself? Nicotine is a neurotoxin that destroys nerve tissues. It is one of the most addictive substances known. The reason smoking is so habit-forming is the fact that nicotine triggers the body's reward system. It releases dopamine, which makes us feel good. A cigarette brings happiness for the moment and who doesn't want that?

But you soon find that you are smoking not because the cigarette makes you happy, but because you feel unhappy if you haven't had a smoke for a while.

What at first feels like a pleasant longing for nicotine has now become a craving, despite the fact that you would rather not smoke. To avoid withdrawal symptoms your body needs continuous doses of nicotine. For most smokers this involves a whole or half packet of cigarettes each day. Just after 30 minutes since your last cigarette, withdrawal symptoms can set in, in the form of a headache, depressed mood, concentration difficulties, restlessness, anger, or anxiety. It is then naturally very tempting to light another cigarette – although it will actually make you feel even worse.

Smoking accelerates ageing

It is a myth that the health risks attached to smoking only affect you later in life. In fact, smoking actually brings on ageing. In a study of pairs of twins where the one twin had been a smoker for at least five years longer than the other, the more experienced smoker showed considerable facial signs of premature aging in the form of drooping eyelids, bags under the eyes, wrinkles and tendencies towards a double chin. So, if your reason for starting to smoke is to appear more grown-up, this might not be quite what you meant?

And your skin is not the only part of your body that suffers if you smoke. Your internal organs are also affected, which means that young smokers are at risk of developing diseases that otherwise only affect older people. A smoker of one pack of cigarettes a day is five times more likely than a non-smoker to have a heart attack before the age of 50. The risk of being stricken with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and cancer of the oesophagus is ten times greater for a smoker. Lung cancer affects first and foremost smokers. The risk is 15 times higher than for non-smokers, including those who become ill after being exposed to extensive *passive smoking*, for example, from living with a smoker.

What is it like to develop COPD?

With each puff on a cigarette, you inhale a number of poisonous substances such as hydrogen cyanide, arsenic and some 60 cancer-causing carcinogens. There-

fore, each puff breaks down your body's defences. And because these toxins are transported through your blood stream, they reach all parts of your body. Smoking therefore leads to problems as diverse as periodontitis (gum disease), age-related blindness (*macular degeneration AMD*), type 2-diabetes and *osteoporosis*, as well as erection difficulties in men. But it is your lungs that suffer the most, since they receive the full intake of smoke before the toxins disperse through your body.

Tobacco smoke attacks lung tissue, which can lead to large cavities caused by the destruction of the alveoli, the tiny air sacs in the lining of the lungs. This impairs oxygen uptake and lung capacity. Damaged alveoli combined with inflammation of the small airways causes *chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)*. Simply put, COPD means that the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide is not working properly and that you therefore find it difficult to get enough oxygen. COPD develops slowly, over several years. At the beginning you may not even perceive the symptoms as signs of an illness. Deteriorating fitness and difficulty climbing stairs can be attributed to other causes. Common early symptoms include wheezing and a sticky cough. This is followed at a later stage by shortness of breath and frequent respiratory infections, then finally weight loss, muscle weakness and osteoporosis.

Patients with COPD describe the condition as being forced to breathe through a straw. All the time!

Difficulty in breathing – often a feeling of suffocation – can lead to chronic anxiety in COPD patients. To slow down the development of COPD, there is only one effective method – to quit smoking.

Smoking kills

We hear and read daily of wars, terrorism, pandemics, and other major catastrophes that affect people in different parts of the world.

But from a global perspective, smoking is the single largest risk factor for ill-health and premature death. Every year, c. 8 million people die globally as a result of smoking.

This corresponds to almost the entire population of Sweden. In Sweden, c. 14,000 people die each year from smoking-related illnesses. Of these, nearly 4,000 die from the effects of lung cancer, almost 3,000 from COPD and about 2,500 from heart attacks and strokes caused by smoking. The reason even young people can suffer a heart attack is because the carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke blocks the red blood cells and thus reduces the body's ability to absorb oxygen, making it more difficult for the heart to work.

If you begin smoking, you shorten your life by 10 years, according to the statistics. And for many of these years that you are alive, you will most likely be unwell, as a result of smoking. So, if you smoke, you are not risking losing ten years at the end of your life, but ten years of your youth and a potentially healthy life.



The people around you are also affected

You may think we are all free to ruin our health if that is our wish, and that choosing to smoke is one's own concern. But do you have the right to also ruin the health of those around you, especially those you love? As a smoker you yourself only breathe in a quarter of all the smoke that is created by each cigarette. Most of the smoke is inhaled by others, in the form of *passive smoking*. Anyone who lives with a smoker, or who in other ways is constantly exposed to other people's smoking, is therefore at risk of developing the very same illnesses as do smokers. Hardest hit are the children who are exposed to passive smoking.

**“Kissing a smoker is like licking an ashtray”.
How attractive is that?**

Passive smoking kills about 500 people a year in Sweden. Living with a smoker increases the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease or lung cancer by 20–30 per cent. It does not help if you “go out to smoke”, since you carry tobacco smoke in your hair, clothes and breath. So, even if you value your life so poorly that you are willing to risk your own life by smoking, surely you would not wish to put your partner's or child's life at risk from your tobacco smoke?

For more information:

<http://www.visominteroker.se/>

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