

Smoking, Heart Disease, and Stroke

Cancer is not the only health risk of smoking. If you smoke, you are at higher risk of heart disease and stroke. Here are the facts¹:

- People who smoke are 2 to 4 times more likely to have heart disease than people who don't smoke
- For people who smoke the risk of having a stroke nearly doubles
- In almost 35% of Americans who die due to smoking-related diseases, the cause is heart and blood vessel disease

The risk of a heart attack or a stroke goes up even more if smokers have other risk factors. These include^{2,3}:

- A family history of heart disease and stroke
- Older age
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Overweight
- Diabetes
- An inactive lifestyle

Also, women who take birth control pills have a higher risk of heart disease and stroke if they smoke cigarettes.⁴

Secondhand smoke is the smoke that others breathe from your lit cigarette or the smoke you exhale. It raises the risk of heart disease and stroke, too.⁴

What smoking does to your heart

Smoking raises the risk of heart and blood vessel disease for a few reasons. It⁴:

- Blocks the heart's arteries, which can lead to a heart attack
- Raises blood pressure
- Decreases high-density lipoprotein (HDL or "good") cholesterol
- Increases the chance of blood clots
- Lowers exercise capacity

Reduce your risk

The good news is that you may reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. You may reduce your family's risk if you smoke in the home too. You can do these things by quitting smoking. Your risk starts to go down within the first year after you quit.⁵

By 5 to 15 years, your risk of stroke may be the same as a person who never smoked. And by 15 years, your risk of heart disease may be about the same as a person who never smoked.⁵

Have you already had a heart attack or stroke? Smokers who have had a heart attack cut their chance of having another one in half when they quit smoking.⁶ Talk to your doctor—and quit today.

References:

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