How Dangerous Is Smoking With Asthma?

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Smoking With Asthma: Why You Should Quit

When my asthma is exacerbated, it can feel as if I am breathing out of a straw. Asthma and hot weather, strong odors and illness do not mix well and often result in an exacerbation — most of these things are outside of my control. However, smoking is a habit that can cause asthma symptoms to worsen, and it's a totally modifiable habit.

Why Smoking Is Bad for Asthmatics

Smoking worsens asthma symptoms for several reasons. Initially, smoking tobacco will cause irritants to settle into the mucus membranes of the lung, which may provoke asthma symptoms.

Long-term smoking will also damage the cilia of the lungs — hair-like structures that keep the lungs clean by sweeping away dust and other irritants. If cilia are damaged, they are unable to rid the lungs of irritants, which can also exacerbate asthma symptoms.

Inhaling secondhand smoke can also be harmful for people with asthma. The smoke from the end of a cigarette or cigar also contains tar, which holds extra carcinogens. This may actually be more harmful than smoking itself.

Other Health Benefits of Smoking Cessation

Quitting smoking not only will improve lung function, but will also improve overall health. Benefits include a lowered risk of lung cancer (and cancer overall), a reduced risk of heart disease and other cardiovascular diseases, and a reduced risk of infertility in women of childbearing age.

The World Health Organization notes that there are benefits to smoking cessation even within minutes of the last puff. For example, within 20 minutes the heart rate and blood pressure drop.

Within one to nine months, coughing and respiratory issues decrease. Within 10 years, lung cancer risk drops to about half that of a smoker, and within 15 years, the risk of heart disease is the same as a nonsmoker's.

How to Quit Smoking

Smoking cessation is difficult because smokers develop a dependence to nicotine, which may be as addictive as cocaine, heroin or alcohol. In fact, in the US, more people are addicted to nicotine than any other drug.

People who quit smoking often start again due to withdrawal symptoms and require several attempts. Withdrawal symptoms include anxiety and anger, concentration issues, hunger with weight gain, and craving tobacco.

That being said, quitting smoking is possible and can be done. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention notes that today, there are more former smokers than current smokers. It can be done!

The question is then, how can you quit smoking?

For some people, quitting cold turkey works best. There are people who can make a decision and stick to it.

Most people need a more structured plan and a support system. The American Cancer Society has a website devoted to resources for smoking cessation. This website has information on planning for smoking cessation, smoking cessation medication aides, and even resources for loved ones who are supporting the decision to quit.

Some people find that joining a smoking cessation program, such as Quit for Life, or a cause such as the Great American Smokeout, increases their likelihood for success.

Others may find that decreasing their tobacco usage gradually or tapering with the use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) may be helpful — although please keep in mind that e-cigarettes still require more research regarding the safety and the efficacy of smoking cessation.

Mind-body practices, such as implementing yoga and meditation, may also help, although they are not a proven therapy for smoking cessation.

Regardless of the method used to quit smoking, the important thing is that it happens. When planning for smoking cessation, keep in mind the benefits for asthma — the improved breathing and the reduction in overall symptoms.

Also remember that quitting smoking will improve health overall — and remember, you can do it!