Smoking and Lung Health – Patients

Smoking in Australia
The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s (AIHW) Australia’s Health 2012 report provides a snapshot of tobacco smoking.1

In Brief:

- Tobacco smoking remains the single most preventable cause of ill health and death in Australia. It contributes to more hospitalisations and deaths each year than alcohol and illicit drug use combined.
- Australia’s level of smoking is falling and is among the lowest for developed countries; with about 1 in 7 people aged 14 or older smoking daily in 2010. Overall, 15% of Australians aged 14 or older now smoke daily, compared with 30% in 1985.
- Certain groups are more likely than average to smoke. These groups include people who are unable to work or who are unemployed, those identifying as homosexual or bisexual and people living in remote areas. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have smoking rates that are more than double the non-Indigenous population.
- It is well documented that second hand smoke is known to cause various health problems in children and adults. Exposure has declined in the last decade, reflecting the decline in the prevalence of smoking and an increase in smokers confining their smoking to outside the home environment.

Health Effects of Smoking
Tobacco smoke contains over 7000 chemical compounds. Many of these agents are toxic and at least 69 cause cancer2. It is a known cause of at least 25 diseases including Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), lung and other cancers, cardiovascular disease and stroke2, 3.

Tobacco smoking is also a risk factor for other conditions such as gastrointestinal disease, adverse reproductive effects, macular degeneration, hair loss, skin ageing and wrinkles, wound infection, gum disease, stomach ulcers, impotence in men, osteoporosis, early menopause and irregular and painful periods in women3.

In Australia, smoking is the major cause of lung cancer and COPD. Around 40% of smoking related deaths are due to lung cancer and 27% to COPD4. Smoking also contributes to worsening of asthma.
Benefits of Smoking Cessation

There are immediate health benefits to quitting smoking at any age, regardless of the presence of smoking-related disease. Stopping smoking decreases the risk of lung and other cancers, heart attack, stroke and chronic disease compared with continued smoking\(^5\).

Stopping smoking is the best thing a person can do to reduce the rate of lung function decline. The graph below provides a comparison of the rate of lung function decline for a smoker with chronic airflow obstruction (commonly known as emphysema) compared to a never smoker. It also highlights what happens for a person with chronic airflow obstruction who stops smoking at 45 and if they stop smoking at 65 years of age. It shows that the onset of respiratory symptoms and disability are delayed by stopping smoking at any age.


Getting Help to Quit Smoking

Going cold turkey works for some people, but you might like to consider talking with a health professional who can guide you on what works best when it comes to quitting. Research has shown that the most effective way to quit is to get some ongoing support from a health professional, using a combination of counseling and medication\(^6\).

Talk to a health professional such as doctor, nurse or pharmacist about making a plan to quit smoking.

Call the Quitline 137848.
Resources
For more information refer to the chapter on Smoking Cessation in Better Living with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, A Patient Guide. Available online at: www.lungfoundation.com.au

Useful Links
- www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au
- www.quitcoach.org.au
- www.icanquit.com.au
- www.quitnow.info.au
- www.ashaust.org.au

References

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