

Did you know that initially it was believed that smoking could cleanse the lungs, since smoking caused coughing and bringing up phlegm? The indigenous nations of the Americas were the first people to smoke tobacco and the habit was introduced to Spain where it became widespread. Soon the trend caught on in the whole Europe and America.

In Thailand, smoking was brought in by foreigners, but some locals have been smoking for a long time. Tobacco can be smoked and chewed. By smoking, tobacco is burned and the smoker inhales the smoke into the lungs, such as in smoking cigarettes, cigars and pipes.

The smoke contains:

■ **Nicotine** — an addictive substance that causes the blood vessels to contract, the heart to race and the blood pressure to rise. The latter two effect make you feel fresh and alert after smoking.

■ **Tar** — a brown coloured substance (you can try blowing smoke on a handkerchief or tissue paper) that clings to the bronchial tubes, causing bronchitis, coughing, emphysema, bronchial carcinoma and lung cancer.

■ **Ammonia** — an irritant that causes a burning sensation in the neck, nose and eyes, as well as inducing coughing and phlegm.

HEALTH 4 ALL ■ DR NITHI MAHANONDA

Kicking the habit



“Smoking is addictive because of nicotine, habit and emotional needs. No matter what the reason, it is possible to quit smoking. How hard it is depends on how strong your will is.”

Carbon monoxide inhibits the blood's ability to carry oxygen so the heart has to work harder. It also causes headaches, fatigue and weakness.

Smoking is also carcinogenic and harms second-hand smokers, giving them risks for bronchial carcinoma and lung cancer.

Other than those, cigarette smoke irritates the respiratory system, especially the breathing tubes and the air sacs in the lungs. This is why smoking often causes chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

The most common diseases that come with smoking include:

- Cancer such as bronchial carcinoma and lung cancer. Cancer of the larynx, lips, bladder and kidney is also common.
- About 80% of emphysema patients are smokers. This disease can cause other complications such as pneumonia, flu and tuberculosis.
- Narrowed coronary artery is common due to calcium and fat build-up. Moreover, smoking causes the arteries to contract and the platelets form blood clots more easily.
- Narrowed arteries in other places are also possible, such as at the brain, causing paralysis, partial paralysis or deep venous thrombosis. Patients can even lose their leg or foot due to this condition.

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A patient of mine was about 40 years old. The first time we met, he had tightness in his chest during smoking and exercise. He always exercised by running 30-40 minutes and playing tennis alternately. He thought exercise would get rid of the bad effects of smoking.

He was wrong, unfortunately. This is like high cholesterol patients who think that if they exercise, they can eat anything. You can't undo these health problems if you do not tackle them at the root cause. It is like trying to mix white with black. You can't expect it to be white. The best you can expect is pale grey!

The pain that he felt was in the middle of his chest, radiating to his left jaw. When he inhaled deeply, he felt like he could not get the air in properly. He also broke into sweat and his heart was shaky. Apart from that, he felt nauseous and dizzy. When he came to see me in the ER at the hospital, I had assumed it was a peptic ulcer because he was still young. However, after an EKG test, I found that he had a heart attack.

The reason for his acute heart attack could have been dehydration (after heavy exercise, too much sweating, without replenishing it by drinking water) coupled with his smoking habit, which caused the coronary artery to narrow and platelets formed blood clots completely. No blood could flow through to the heart muscles.

He was treated with balloon angioplasty and stent implantation. He recovered very quickly and he could go home in three to four days. Before he left, I told him to quit smoking and exercise correctly, as well as drink water to make up for the loss of fluid.

A month later, everything seemed to be going well. He exercised correctly and stopped smoking. I gave him that advice because for smokers, after a year of not smoking, the chance of heart disease could drop by 50%.

However, about a year after his heart attack, he came back to see me. I noticed something strange about him.

Me: Why are you smoking again?

Him: How do you know that?

Me: Your lips are dark and you smell of cigarettes. How could I not know?

He confessed that he had actually taken a shower, washed his hair, put on cologne and changed his clothes. He also had not smoked before he came to see me, just because he was afraid I would know.

Me: If you want to live a long and healthy life, you really should quit smoking. Next time you might not be as lucky as you were. Actually, over 30% of heart attack victims will not survive, and half of those who die do not even make it to a hospital.

Him: Okay, fine. I can quit. It's easy. I'm good at this.

Me: Good at what?

Him: I'm good at quitting smoking. I only started smoking again three months ago, but I have quit successfully a few times already. It's not that hard.

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