

Sunday Health

CIGARETTE SMOKING

Before you take the next drag, find out what exactly it does to your body. The answer might just shock you

By SEEMA KUMAR

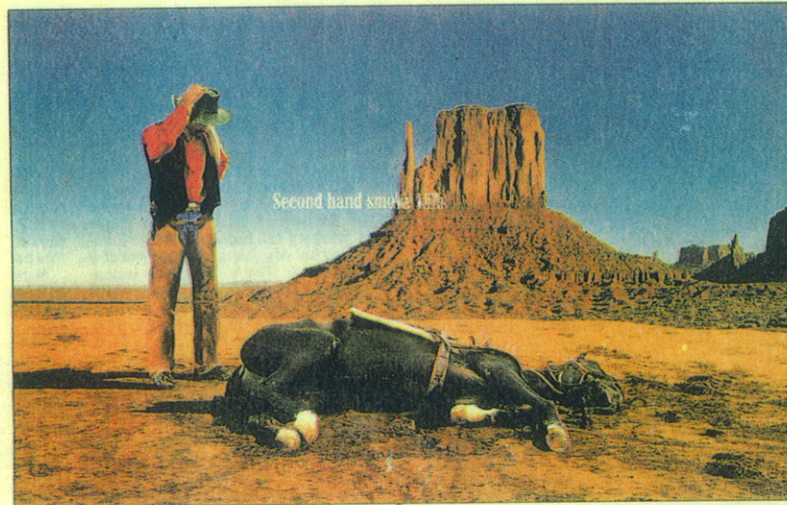
Smokers will tell you what a pleasurable thing it is to take a deep drag on a cigarette. But what exactly does smoking a cigarette do to one's body? Few smokers would be able to answer that question with any accuracy. They will have certainly heard of the risk of cancer, the increased vulnerability to heart attacks, but they will not know the precise, unpalatable details. Well, here are those disturbing details, and yes, cancer is one of them.

"Cancer is one offshoot of smoking. There is much more," says Dr Vikram Jaggi, a chest specialist. "But most smokers couldn't be bothered with cancer because the feeling is, it can't be me. But why not? It can happen to anyone."

Dr Jaggi, who runs a Quit Smoking Clinic at his Asthma, Chest and Allergy Centre in Delhi, sounds ominous when he says, "A person who has smoked 20-30 cigarettes regularly for more than 10 to 15 years has reduced his life expectancy by about 10 years. 50 per cent of the heavy smokers will die due to a cause related to smoking." Frightening. We list below at least eight good reasons to quit smoking.

What it does to the body

When you take a puff, the nicotine in the cigarette reaches the oral cavity, goes into the bloodstream, liver and reaches the brain in eight seconds flat. "Are you aware of this?" asks Dr Jaggi. "It is almost as fast as you give an injection into the vein. In fact, it is faster than an intramuscular injection and faster than almost all tablets you eat orally." With every cigarette you smoke, 2.5 mg of nicotine enters your body. Gradually, this affects the brain - like a drug addiction. In fact, nicotine addiction is much stronger than cocaine or morphine, says Dr Jaggi. It affects the blood system, has



Kick that BUTT

an adverse affect on cholesterol, causes thickening of arteries, affects the heart, increases heart rate and heart attack propensity, causes stroke, various kinds of cancer, and problems in the lungs, particularly in the air tubes (like bronchitis and emphysema). There are approximately 4,000 identified chemicals in cigarette smoke, of which about 600 are known to be carcinogenic.

Smoking during pregnancy

There's nothing worse a pregnant woman can do than smoke. It is clearly documented that a pregnant woman who smokes has more still births, more abortions, and her children will weigh 20-25 per cent less than children of non-smoking mothers. Even after childbirth, if a woman continues to smoke and the child is around, there is possibility of crib death. Children of women who smoke have two times more infections of the throat and ear than non-smoking mother's kids.

Does the baby choke in the womb when the mother smokes? "That's going a bit far," says Dr Jaggi. But the fact is that nicotine passes very well through the placenta and reaches the amniotic fluid (the fluid surrounding the baby). It is also present in breast milk.

"Considering doctors are careful not to give expectant mothers an aspirin or crocin, this is poisonous stuff," says Dr Jaggi.

Skin, teeth, tongue, eyes

A smoker has wrinkled skin, yellow teeth, sagging cheeks, grey hair and is prone to baldness. Teeth become yellow and prone to dental caries and fall spontaneously. Smokers have a coated tongue and lose their taste buds. Those who quit smoking suddenly realise the taste of food.

Lungs and heart

Everybody knows smoking causes lung cancer but it also causes

Smoking can affect the passive smoker too as this award-winning O&M advertisement on anti-smoking shows so innovatively

emphysema and bronchitis. These are very, very serious long-term conditions which are debilitating. Smoking can also cause a heart attack. Here's how: It increases the bad cholesterol and decreases good cholesterol. It narrows the arteries which take blood to the heart.

The heart rate in turn increases, so does the pulse rate, and more adrenaline is pumped into the body, which causes the heart to pump faster. All this, in turn, can cause a heart attack.

Other possible ailments

Smoking affects the lower limbs. Sometimes people get gangrene in the lower limbs. It is almost 100 per cent related to smoking. The arteries that supply blood to the lower limbs, toes etc, get thin and blocked. In this case, there is no choice but to amputate the limb. Smoking also causes impotence. You tell a smoker about lung cancer and he will not take you seriously. But tell him about skin changes and impotence, it will hit home.

Nicotine and its effects

Nicotine is one of the chemicals present in the leaves that cigarettes are made of. This is what causes addiction to cigarettes.

But nicotine is not solely responsible for all the harmful ef-



A lung test in progress

How to quit smoking

The wish to quit has to come from within. Not because the wife is nagging. Children can definitely get a parent to quit. Here are a few ways to help you quit:

- Set a quit date. Get rid of cigarettes and ashtrays at home and workplace. Don't let people smoke around you.
- Tell family, friends, and co-workers about your decision and seek their support.
- Distract yourself from urges to smoke. Talk to someone, go for a walk, or get busy with a task.
- Medication too can help you stop smoking.
- Most relapses occur within the first three months after quitting. Don't be discouraged. Most people try several times before they finally quit.

fects of smoking. Other constituents like carbon monoxide, tar etc cause the other damage associated with smoking.

The passive smoker

Roughly one fourth of whatever smoking does to smokers is what it does to passive smokers.

"Quitting is ideal but more ideal would be not to start smoking in the first place. After all, smokers start young. And they begin because of the advertisements. Ten per cent of the government's excise revenue comes from cigarettes, two per cent of the total government revenue again comes from cigarettes. It is not a meagre amount. The government is not going to let go of it," says Dr Jaggi. He further adds, "Some sports brands have them on sports gear due to which children actually think sportsmen smoke."

"Remember the Marlboro man who was considered the macho man in the US? He died of smoking. The next model they too also died of smoking. Need I say more?"