SMOKING – SIDE EFFECTS YOU HAVEN’T HEARD OF

Tobacco harms more than your respiratory system; it can turn every organ in your body against you. Each year, tobacco causes more deaths than HIV, murders, suicides, drug and alcohol use, and automobile accidents combined.

It’s important to know how smoking truly affects your entire body.

Many side effects

You’ve heard it a thousand times before: smoking can lead to lung cancer and cause heart disease. However, out of the 45 million smokers in the United States, many aren’t aware of all the health risks.

A female smoker is 12 times more likely to develop lung cancer than a non-smoker. For men, that number rises to 22 times more likely. Lung cancer isn’t the only form of cancer linked to tobacco, though.

Many other potentially fatal forms of tobacco-related cancer include:
• Cancer of the mouth, lips or tongue
• Cancer of the esophagus (throat)
• Cancer of the nose
• Cancer of the pancreas or urinary tract
• Cancer of the penis, cervix, or vulva
• Squamous cell carcinoma, a type of skin cancer

Non-cancerous health issues

Cancer isn’t the only health concern associated with nicotine. Smoking has been linked to other illnesses and problems, such as Crohn’s disease, lupus, chronic bronchitis, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, infertility, and diabetes. With many of these illnesses, continued smoking irritates and worsens the condition.

Smoking also increases the risk of developing osteoporosis and bone fractures. Tobacco use has been shown to lower bone density. Decreased bone density is a larger concern for women, since smoking is linked to early menopause, which can substantially decrease bone mass as well. Because of lower bone density, smokers are more likely to fracture or break their bones, especially as they get older. Plus, the breaks and fractures of smokers take much longer to heal than for non-smokers.

In addition to illnesses, smoking affects your physical appearance. Wrinkles in the skin occur much earlier in smokers, making smokers appear to be years older than their actual age. Fingernails and hair get discolored in smokers, and smelly clothes are a common side effect.

Smoking and oral health

Smoking cigarettes, pipes, and cigars can lead to an increased risk of problems in your mouth, including:
• Bad breath and stained teeth
• Tooth loss; plaque and tartar buildup
• Susceptibility to infections and gum disease
• Problems with salivary glands and jawbones
• Slower healing from dental procedures and surgery
• Increased risk of mouth, lip, tongue, and throat cancer

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Smoking and vision
Smoking also increases the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) – the leading cause of blindness for people older than 65. Even passive smokers have increased risk of AMD.

Bottom line
Non-smokers’ health risks are tiny compared to those of smokers. Quitting smoking, regardless of your age or how long you have smoked, helps you feel better – and look better.

Additional resources
Visit MyHumana on Humana.com and click on the “Health & Wellness” tab and “Condition Centers” to find the section on tobacco cessation in the pull-down tab.

Sources
www.thescoops on smoking.org
www.cancer.org