Asthma and Smoking

You will find definite benefits in your health and quality of your life, as well as remove the risk of damage to your children’s lungs, when you quit smoking.

This information sheet is written to remind smokers of the dangers of smoking and the benefits of quitting. It can be done. It is never too late.

The dangers of cigarette smoke
Cigarette smoke contains many substances that can damage the lungs.

The smoke has two parts: tar and the gas, which contains carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides and other toxins including the additive chemical, nicotine. Smoking takes these poisonous substances directly into the lungs.

The tar in cigarette smoke damages cells in the airways of the lungs. Eventually this damage can produce cells that grow uncontrollably – leading to cancer of the lung or voice box (larynx). Smoking can also lead to Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

Cigarette smoke also releases substances into your blood stream that can damage other organs. Arteries in your heart, brain and other places may be affected. This can lead to angina, heart attacks, strokes and poor circulation. It also increases your chances of developing cancer in other areas of the body.

Tobacco smoke irritates the airways in the lungs, causing the cells to produce lots of mucus (phlegm). The normal cleaning action of the lung is also affected, so that the mucus and other irritants are not removed. This means that smokers and those exposed to cigarette smoke are more prone to chest and throat infections, with an increase in the chances of permanently damaging the airways.

Passive smoking
Passive smoking is breathing in other people’s cigarette smoke, both from the burning end of a cigarette and the smoke breathed out by smokers. Smoke from the burning end of a cigarette (sidestream smoke) has not passed through the cigarette filter and contains higher concentrations of chemicals than the mainstream smoke breathed in by the smoker.

Pregnancy
If a woman smokes during pregnancy the chemicals in the smoke are passed onto the baby before birth and affect the cells of the lung and air passages.

Smoking during pregnancy has been linked to small unwell babies, higher rate of stillbirth, premature labour, premature birth, maternal haemorrhage, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Babies of smokers are more likely to suffer from asthma and respiratory infections than those of non-smokers.
Mothers should not smoke during pregnancy, and other adults should not smoke near expectant mother, children or in houses where children live.

**Childhood**

Young children have smaller, more delicate lungs than adults and are therefore more affected by tobacco smoke. Research has shown that children exposed to cigarette smoke are more likely to develop respiratory problems such as wheezing, asthma symptoms, worsen pre-existing asthma, or other acute respiratory illness.

**Smoking and Asthma**

Smoking is dangerous for everyone. If you have asthma, smoking is probably the worst thing you can do. Cigarette smoke contains harmful chemicals that irritate the lungs. People with asthma generally have chronically inflamed lower airways. If you smoke (or breathe in other people’s smoke) you can aggravate this inflammation and exacerbate asthma symptoms.

Compared with non-smokers with asthma, smokers with asthma have

- More asthma symptoms
- Worse asthma control
- A more rapid decline in lung function
- More airway inflammation
- Less response to preventer medication

If you have asthma and breathe in other people’s smoke you increase the risk of an asthma ‘attack’. Do not be afraid to ask other people to stop smoking around you. If you do smoke, try to quit.

**The benefits of quitting**

The sooner you quit, the less likely it is that your lungs and other organs will be damaged. If COPD has started to develop, quitting smoking will prevent further damage. The risk of lung cancer increases the more you smoke and the longer you smoke. Once you quit, the risk of lung cancer goes down.

**Quitting**

Quitting smoking can be very difficult, but many smokers find it easier than expected. Despite the difficulties, more and more smokers are managing to stop every day. It can be done and you will find very definite benefits to your health and quality of life. Most smokers are addicted to the nicotine in cigarettes. There are many options available to assist you. Talk to your doctor, pharmacists or asthma educator about nicotine-replacement therapy, counselling and other treatments that can help you to quit.

For further information on quitting talk to your doctor or ring the **Quitline** on 131 848.

**For further information contact:**
Asthma Nurse Educator Service
ACT Health.
Ph: 02 6205 2071

This resource has been adapted by the Asthma Nurse Educator Service, ACT Health using information from Asthma Victoria information sheet – Asthma and Smoking prepared according to the guidelines and standards approved by Asthma Australia and the National Asthma Campaign.

**Disclaimer:** The information contained in this fact sheet is intended to support not replace discussion with your doctor or health care professionals. The authors accept no responsibility for any inaccuracies, information perceived as misleading, or the success of any treatment regimen detailed in the handouts.

To be reviewed August 2016.