
The Health Benefits of Smoking Cessation:

A Report of The Surgeon General, 1990

At A Glance

The Health Benefits of Smoking Cessation: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1990 systematically reviews the health benefits and consequences of smoking cessation.

For decades the Surgeon General has been reporting the bad news about smoking—that smoking causes lung cancer and other diseases. Now Surgeon General Antonia C. Novello, M.D., has some good news.

Quitting smoking carries major and immediate health benefits for men and women of all ages, even those in the older age groups. Benefits apply to healthy people and to those already suffering from smoking-related diseases.

According to Dr. Novello: “Smoking cessation represents the single most important step that smokers can take to enhance the length and quality of their lives.”

Good News—Quit for Life!

People who quit smoking live longer than those who continue to smoke:

- After 15 years off cigarettes, the risk of death for ex-smokers returns to nearly the level of persons who have never smoked.
- Male smokers who quit between ages 35 to 39 add an average of 5 years to their lives. Female quitters in this age group add 3 years. Men and women who quit at ages 65 to 69, increase their life expectancy by 1 year.

More Good News. . . Quit for Health!

Quitting smoking decreases the risk of lung cancer, many other cancers, heart disease, stroke, chronic lung diseases, and respiratory illnesses:

- The risk of lung cancer for ex-smokers drops to as much as one-half that of continuing smokers, after 10 years. The risk continues to decline with additional years of staying smoke-free.
- After 1 year off cigarettes, the excess risk of heart disease caused by smoking is reduced by half. After 15 years of abstinence, the risk is similar to that of persons who have never smoked.

- In 5 to 15 years, the risk of stroke for ex-smokers returns to the level of those who have never smoked.
- Ex-smokers who have been off cigarettes for many years are less likely to die of chronic lung diseases, such as emphysema, than those who continue to smoke.
- Ex-smokers have better health status than current smokers. Ex-smokers have fewer days of illness, fewer health complaints, better self-reported health status, and reduced rates of bronchitis and pneumonia.



Quitting Is Good Medicine.

Even for smokers who are sick, quitting can help.

For people with . . .

Heart Disease

Peripheral Artery Disease
(poor circulation to the legs)

Ulcers

Quitting smoking . . .

Reduces the risk of repeat heart attacks and death from heart disease by 50 percent or more.

Improves ability to exercise and increases overall survival.

Reduces the risk of recurrence and improves short-term healing.

There Are Unique Benefits for Women who Quit.

- If all women quit smoking during pregnancy, about 5 percent of deaths among newborn infants could be prevented.
 - Women who stop smoking before becoming pregnant or during the first trimester of pregnancy reduce their risk of having a low birthweight baby to that of women who have never smoked.
 - It takes female smokers longer to get pregnant than nonsmokers. Women who quit smoking before trying to get pregnant are as likely to get pregnant as women who have never smoked.
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Some Consequences of Quitting Are . . .

- Nearly 80 percent of those who quit smoking gain weight, compared to 56 percent of continuing smokers.
- Short-term consequences of nicotine withdrawal include: anxiety, irritability, frustration, anger, difficulty concentrating, and restlessness. Possible long-term consequences are urges to smoke and increased appetite.

But at the Same Time. . .

- The average weight gain after quitting smoking is just 5 pounds, and only 3.5 percent of those who quit gain more than 20 pounds after quitting.
- Nicotine withdrawal symptoms peak in the first 1 to 2 days after quitting and subside rapidly during the following weeks. With long-term abstinence, ex-smokers are likely to enjoy favorable psychological changes such as enhanced self-esteem and increased sense of control.
- People who quit smoking are more likely than current smokers to exercise regularly. Exercise may help new quitters to stay off cigarettes and avoid or minimize weight gain.

The Bottom Line:

The health benefits of quitting far exceed any risks from the average 5-pound weight gain or any adverse psychological effects that may follow quitting.

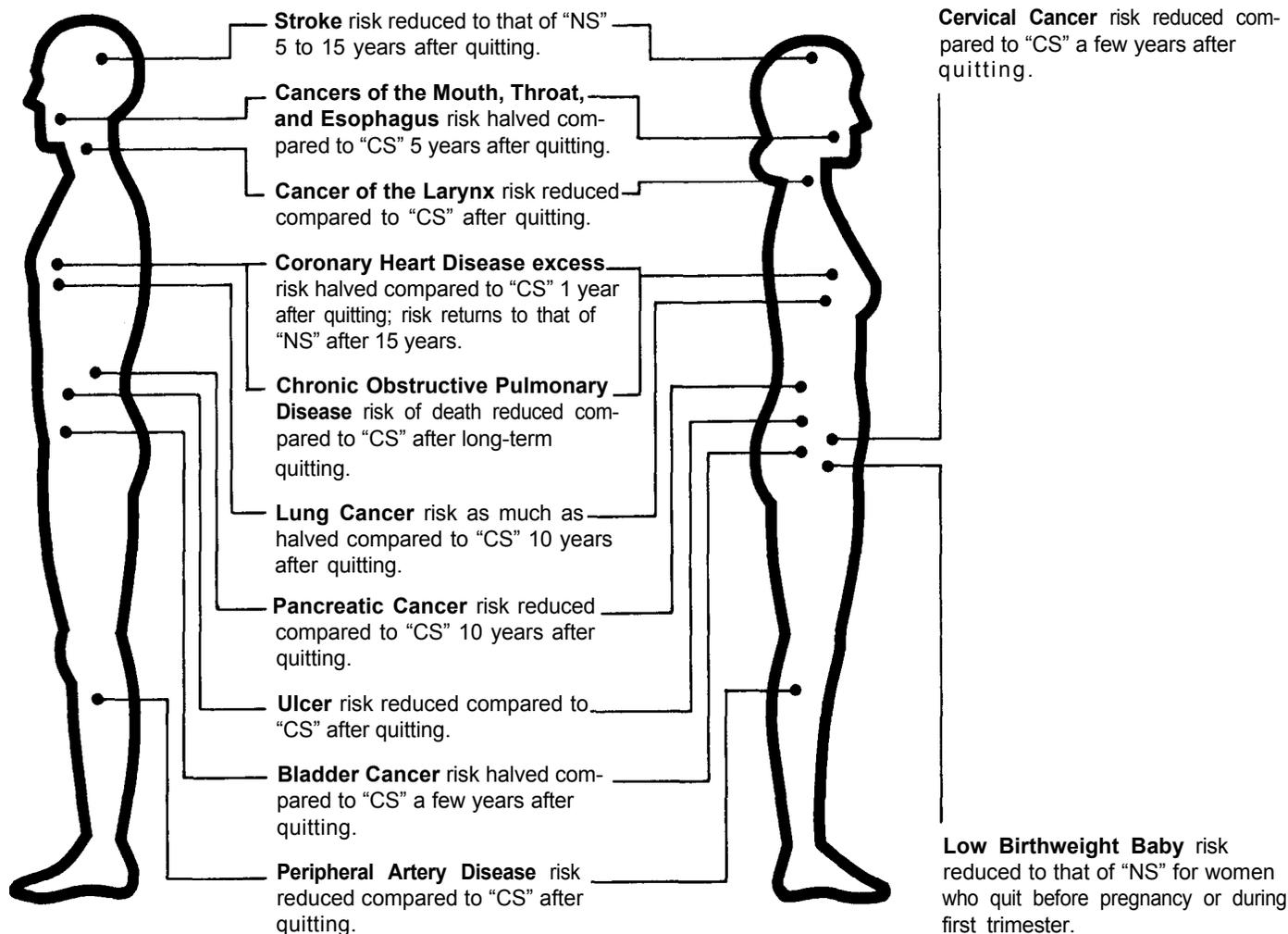
Special Update: Pregnant Women

About 30 percent of women who are cigarette smokers quit after learning they are pregnant, with greater proportions quitting among married women and especially among women with higher levels of educational attainment. However, about 25 percent of pregnant women in the United States smoke throughout pregnancy.

Benefits of Smoking Cessation

Key

“CS” refers to continuing smokers,
“NS” refers to never smokers.



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CDC
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL

More than 38 Million Ex-smokers!

More than 38 million American adults have quit smoking, and nearly half of all living adults who ever smoked cigarettes have quit. Between 1966 and 1987 quitting increased among men and women, among blacks and whites, and among all educational subgroups.

Quitting Isn't Always Easy.

Most ex-smokers cycle through the quitting process several times before becoming long-term quitters. At least one-third of smokers who stay off cigarettes for 1 or more years may eventually relapse. However, relapse becomes less likely as ex-smokers stay off cigarettes for longer periods of time.

Who Are Today's Quitters?

Various groups are quitting at different rates. Here is the breakdown:

- Women are more likely than men to try to quit smoking. However, an equal proportion of men and women have been off cigarettes for 1 to 4 years. Men are more likely than women to have been off cigarettes for 5 or more years.
- Blacks are more likely than whites to try to quit smoking. However, whites are more likely than blacks to have been off cigarettes for 1 or more years.
- Younger smokers (ages 20 to 44) are more likely than older smokers to try to quit smoking.

- People with any college education are more likely than those without any college education to both try to quit smoking and to stay off cigarettes for 1 or more years.

Helpful Hint. . .

To help limit weight gain after quitting: eat a well-balanced diet and avoid the excess calories in sugary and fatty foods; satisfy cravings for sweets by eating small pieces of fruit; have low-calorie foods on hand for nibbling; drink 6 to 8 glasses of water per day; and build exercise into your life by walking 30 minutes a day or doing the physical activity of your choice, such as running, cycling, swimming, or gardening.

If you cannot walk outside, walk at your local mall. Talk with your physician about an exercise program that is right for you.

Facts at a Glance. . .

From the *1990 Surgeon General's Report (1990 SGR)* and Other Sources:

- More than 38 million Americans have quit smoking cigarettes (*1990 SGR*).
- More than 50 million Americans continue to smoke (*1990 SGR*).
- A recent poll showed that almost two-thirds of smokers say they would like to quit (*Gallup Poll, May 31, 1990*).
- Only 19% of people who have ever smoked have never tried to quit (*1990 SGR*).
- Each year about one-third of adult smokers—19 million people—quit for at least 1 day (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute, In Press*).
- Each year about 1.3 million smokers quit successfully, representing less than 10% of those who try to quit (*JAMA May 23/30, 1990*).
- Smokers often try to quit more than once before they succeed. 70% of ex-smokers made 1 or 2 quit attempts; 22% made 3, 4 or 5 quit attempts, and 9% quit 6 or more times before succeeding (*1986 Adult Use of Tobacco Survey*).
- One study shows that Hispanics are quitting at lower rates than the general population (*JAMA January 6, 1989*).
- About 90% of successful quitters do so on their own (*JAMA May 23/30, 1990*).
- With good smoking cessation programs, 20% to 40% of participants are able to quit smoking and stay off cigarettes for at least one year (*1988 SGR*).
- 30% to 40% of smokers either do not believe that cigarette smoking increases the risks of various diseases or do not believe that quitting smoking reduces the risks (*1990 SGR*).

Both full copies and summaries of *The Health Benefits of Smoking Cessation: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1990* are available. For more information about the Report or to order a free summary, write to:

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