

a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

HCV Wellness:
***Facts and Fiction
about Smoking***

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THERE ARE SOME MYTHS ABOUT SMOKING.

Getting the facts may help you quit. Here are some common misconceptions about quitting:

1) “People gain weight when they quit smoking.”

This is true, but not the whole truth. The majority of those who quit smoking do gain weight, usually less than 10 pounds. However, not everyone does gain weight. Being more physically active can prevent weight gain. The use of medications and/or nicotine replacement (such as nicotine gum) also helps. More importantly, the benefits of quitting smoking far outweigh the health risk of weight gain. Besides, you can build on your success. If you can quit smoking, you can lose weight later.

2) “If I gain weight I will be less attractive.”

Think about this for a moment. First, nonsmokers often find smokers unattractive. Second, premature aging, yellow teeth and cigarette odor are not attractive. Third, do the benefits of being thin outweigh the risks of lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases?

3) “Smoking is relaxing.”

Nicotine is a stimulant. The relaxation response is usually because smoking temporarily calms down nicotine withdrawal effects – effects that feel

like anxiety. There are effective stress reduction techniques that can help withdrawal symptoms and help you manage stress.

4) “I can’t quit. I have tried too many times to quit.”

The average smoker has 5 to 7 attempts before permanently quitting. It takes as long as it takes. Keep trying until you find a way to quit for good.

5) “I am too old to quit.”

Older smokers are 50% more likely than any other age group to quit smoking successfully. Wisdom accompanies age and that can be a powerful tool to help you quit.

6) “I can’t afford to use nicotine replacement therapy (NRT).”

Your medical insurance (including publicly funded ones, such as Medi-Cal) may pay for NRT. The money saved by not buying cigarettes is likely to cover the cost of NRT.

7) “I enjoy smoking.”

Ask yourself how true this statement is. Do you enjoy every cigarette you smoke or just the ones that are associated with certain rituals, such as after a meal or with a glass of alcohol? Is the enjoyment worth the risk to your health? Look ahead and ask yourself if you think you will still enjoy smoking if you have lung or heart disease.

8) “It’s too late. I have already damaged my body.”

Your body starts to reverse the damage in as little as 12 hours. Everyone can get some benefit from quitting. Even the elderly who have smoked many years gain some health improvement from quitting.

9) “Quitting smoking is uncomfortable.”

This is true. However, it is short-term discomfort that improves over time. Lung cancer and breathing problems are much more uncomfortable.

10) “My grandmother smoked until she died at 95 and she was never sick a day in her life.”

Your grandmother was very lucky, but she was an exception to the rule. Is this really a chance you want to take?

HERE ARE SOME FACTS ABOUT SMOKING.

Nearly half a million people die annually in the U.S. because of smoking. Compare that to 8,000 to 12,000 deaths related to hepatitis C viral infection (HCV). Smokers who continue to smoke have a fifty-fifty chance of dying a smoking-related death. Deaths from HCV-related complications are around 3%. This means that smokers with HCV are at a much higher risk of death from smoking than from HCV.

Here are some more facts about smoking:

- Smoking may lead to more HCV-related inflammation.
- In the U.S., one in five people dies a smoking-related death – one in 34,000 dies an HCV-related death.
- More deaths are caused each year by tobacco use than by all deaths from human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), illegal drug use, alcohol use, motor vehicle injuries, suicides, and murders combined.
- More people die from secondhand smoke (70,000) than from HCV. Smoking around children and immune-compromised adults exposes them to potentially lethal agents.
- Pregnant women exposed to secondhand smoke risk unintended termination of pregnancy. Babies may be born small and are at risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Children born to mothers who were exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to have learning and health problems.
- Children who breathe secondhand smoke are at risk for asthma and other health problems.
- Smoking is the number one cause of fires and accidental deaths from fire. Contrary to popular belief, this is not due to falling asleep and smoking, but rather from improper disposal of smoking materials.
- There are more than 4,000 chemicals in cigarette smoke. Some of these are in wood varnish, insect and rat poison. If you are a smoker reluctant to undergo HCV treatment because you do not want to “put chemicals into your body,” you are already doing this with each cigarette you smoke.
- One half of all people who have ever smoked have quit.
- Each cigarette smoked shaves 7 minutes from smokers’ lives. Nearly one day of life is traded for each carton of cigarettes that is smoked.
- The public pays about \$8 in health costs and loss of productivity for every pack of cigarettes that is sold.

For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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