

Just the facts about...

Smoking

Fact 1 - Carbon monoxide & Nicotine

Carbon monoxide replaces oxygen in the body. Cigarette smoke contains between 1 and 3 per cent carbon monoxide. Experiments show that smoking only one pack of cigarettes within an eight-hour period results in a 7 to 15 per cent carbon monoxide saturation of the blood. This reduces the amount of available oxygen in the body and hinders muscle action and mental function. The carbon monoxide literally 'starves' the body of oxygen, which is vital to our survival. Carbon monoxide is an all too common poison used in suicides by means of car exhausts. (Source: Don't Stop Smoking until you've read this book, DR. H Alder & DR K Morris.)

Nicotine, the active and addictive ingredient of tobacco, is a mild central nervous system stimulant and a stronger cardiovascular system stimulant. It constricts blood vessels, increasing the blood pressure and stimulating the heart, and raises the blood fat levels. In its liquid form nicotine is a powerful poison — the injection of even one drop would be deadly. It is the nicotine, not the smoke, that causes people to continue to smoke cigarettes, but it is the cigarette smoke that causes many of the problems.

Cigarette smoke is a combination of lethal gases — carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, and nitrogen and sulphur oxides, to name a few — and tars, and contains an estimated 4,000 chemicals. Some of these chemical agents are introduced by current tobacco manufacturing processes, so as to make the taste sweeter and more palatable to young people, and to increase the addictive properties. Although tobacco has been smoked for centuries, only recently has it moved from the naturally grown and dried process. It appears that in the last century the negative effects of smoking have increased, partially due to the added risk produced by the chemical treatment and unnatural processing of tobacco.

Dangers in modern tobacco products include pesticides used during growth and chemicals added to the tobacco to make it burn better or taste different. Chemicals added to the leaves and papers to enhance burning are among the major causes of fire deaths, as cigarettes continue to burn after they have been put down. The forced burning also makes people smoke more of each cigarette in order to complete it. Sugar curing and rapid flue drying are also associated with increased toxicity of cigarettes. Kerosene heat drying contaminates the tobacco with another toxic hydrocarbon.

Other toxic contaminants in cigarettes include cadmium (which affects the kidneys, arteries, and blood pressure), lead, arsenic, cyanide and nickel. Dioxin, the most toxic pesticide chemical known to date, has been found in cigarettes. Acetonitrile, another pesticide, is also found in tobacco. The nitrogen gases from cigarettes generate carcinogenic nitrosamines in the body tissues. The tars in smoke contain polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH), carcinogenic materials that bind with cellular DNA to cause damage. Radioactive materials, such as polonium, are also found in cigarette smoke. Some authorities believe that cigarettes are our greatest source of radiation. A smoker of one-and-a-half packs per day may be exposed to radiation equal to 300 chest x rays a year. Radiation is a strong aging factor. Acetaldehyde, a chemical released during smoking, causes aging, especially of the skin, as it affects the cross-linking bonds that hold our tissues together.

Source: Elson M. Haas MD (excerpt from *Staying Healthy with Nutrition*, Celestial Arts)
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