

# TOBACCO

HEALTH EFFECTS OF SMOKING



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health**

# WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF SMOKING?

The fact that smoking is legal doesn't mean that it's not harmful, or that it is less harmful than illegal drugs.<sup>1</sup> In fact, smoking causes 90% of drug-related deaths.<sup>1</sup> Smoking is legal because it was already widely used and widely socially accepted before the health risks became understood.

Smoking is one of the leading preventable causes of death and disease in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Each year, smoking kills an estimated 15,000<sup>2</sup> Australians and costs Australia \$31.5 billion in social and economic costs.<sup>3</sup> Half to two-thirds of smokers will die early as a result of smoking, and smokers who die because of smoking lose on average about 13 years of life.<sup>4,5</sup>

Sometimes people believe that a certain type of tobacco — for example, loose leaf rolling tobacco — is more natural and healthier than manufactured 'tailor-made' cigarettes. This is wrong.<sup>1</sup> Inhaling smoke directly into the body is harmful, no matter what type of tobacco someone is smoking. Smoking roll-your-own cigarettes results in the same levels of cancer-causing chemicals in the body as factory-made cigarettes.<sup>6</sup>

The negative health impact from smoking grows over time, but problems start early.<sup>5</sup> Adults who smoked during adolescence can have lungs that never grow to their potential size or perform at full capacity.<sup>5</sup> Research into young smokers shows that problems, such as early warning heart disease, and damage to the aorta (the artery that carries blood to many internal organs), begin at an early age.<sup>15</sup> Young people who smoke, or who are exposed to second-hand smoke, can develop breathing conditions that are so serious that they are diagnosed as asthma.<sup>5</sup> Each cigarette causes inflammation and cell damage inside a person's body.<sup>7</sup>

The physical health risks of smoking are better known, but evidence is growing that smoking also negatively impacts one's mental health.<sup>8-11</sup>

Smoking poses many health risks, including:<sup>1,12-14</sup>

- **Smoking is the largest cause of cancer in Australians, even though only one in five adults smoke – for example, smoking is the cause of around 90% of lung cancers.**
- **Smoking is also the major cause of cancers of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, pharynx, larynx (voice box), tongue, lips and salivary glands.**
- **Smoking causes 70% (or more) of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases (COPD) such as emphysema. Emphysema is a lung disease that makes it harder and harder for people to breathe. This continues to worsen over time until they eventually die.**
- **Smokers are 2-4 times more at risk of developing heart disease, which can lead to heart attacks, than non-smokers.**
- **Smoking leads to diseases of the blood vessels. This can result in people having strokes<sup>13</sup> or needing amputations because part of one of their limbs has died.**

Other health problems associated with smoking include:<sup>1,8, 9,11,13</sup>

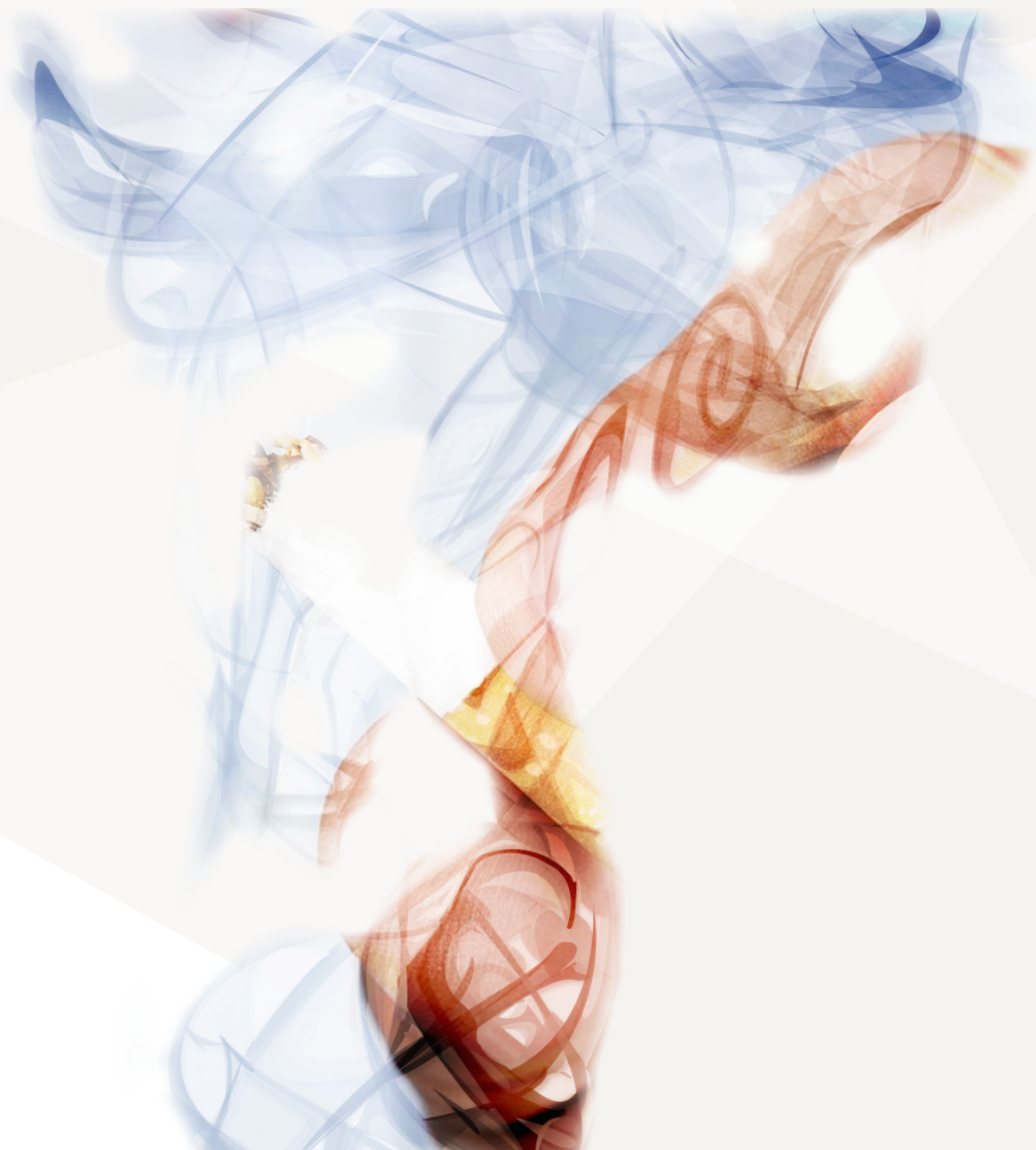
- **Smoking does not necessarily cause immediate death. Instead, smokers will often suffer from conditions and diseases that usually only effect the elderly. These can emerge at a younger age and last longer for smokers.**
- **Smokers are more likely to experience a dental disease called periodontitis that can lead to tooth loss.**
- **Smokers' skin ages and wrinkles faster.**
- **Smokers have an increased risk of eye diseases leading to reduced vision and blindness.**
- **Smoking dangerously worsens the effects of diabetes and makes asthma more difficult to control.**

- **Female smokers can experience disrupted menstrual periods. Male smokers are more likely to suffer impotence.**
- **Smokers have a higher risk of several serious types of infections including meningococcal disease, a dangerous infection that more often affects younger people.**
- **Smokers are likely to develop poorer mental health, particularly anxiety disorders and depression.**

Modern science is uncovering the exact mechanisms by which smoking causes so many diseases.<sup>7</sup> For example, the genome for a small-cell lung cancer was recently sequenced showing many signs of damage caused by cigarette smoke toxins.<sup>15</sup>

Other smoking-related problems include:<sup>1,3,16</sup>

- **Smokers on low incomes often spend a substantial proportion of their money on cigarettes, making it harder to afford daily essentials like food**
- **Smokers spend more time off work sick, and can lose pay as a result**
- **Smoking-related illnesses cause emotional suffering and financial hardship for smokers and their families**



# IF CIGARETTES ARE SO BAD FOR YOU, WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE START SMOKING?

Tobacco companies need to market cigarettes heavily to children and teenagers to replace the smokers who die or give up. The large majority of these 'replacement smokers' (as the tobacco industry calls them) start smoking in their teens.<sup>5</sup> Nearly nine out of ten adult smokers start by age 18, and almost no adults over age 26 take up smoking.<sup>5</sup>

Children and teenagers underestimate their chances of becoming addicted to cigarettes, and overestimate their likelihood of giving up while they are young.

In Australia, the tobacco industry is banned from advertising in traditional formats such as television, radio, and print media (including newspapers and magazines), but the industry still makes every effort that it can to ensure that smoking appears to be normal, glamorous, rebellious, independent and grown-up. Portrayals of smoking in films, TV, music videos, sport sponsorship, and smoking by celebrities are all useful to the industry. The internet is an increasingly important marketing tool for tobacco companies. Price discounts and promotions are some other methods that tobacco companies use to try and entice young people to smoke. Governments in all states and territories have legislation to reduce these practices.

Some people take up smoking because they believe it helps with weight loss, but recent research has found that there is little evidence that this is true for young people.<sup>5</sup> Young smokers did not weigh less, and some research found that they weighed more than young non-smokers.<sup>5</sup>

## WHY IS SMOKING SO BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH?

The main health damage comes from the cigarette smoke. Research shows that cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals and chemical compounds.<sup>7</sup> A recent review by the United States Food and Drug Administration identified more than 93 harmful or potentially harmful chemicals in cigarette smoke.<sup>7,17</sup> Tobacco smoke itself is classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as a human carcinogen (as it causes cancer).<sup>17</sup>

Some of the toxins in cigarette smoke settle in the mouth, throat and lungs, whilst others travel in the bloodstream throughout the body.<sup>7</sup>

The longer a person smokes, and the more they smoke, the greater their risk of developing diseases such as lung cancer.<sup>7</sup>

A few of the harmful ingredients of tobacco smoke include:<sup>7,17</sup>

- **Carbon monoxide – this also comes out of car exhausts.**
- **Tobacco-specific nitrosamines – a group of highly carcinogenic chemicals found mainly in tobacco smoke.**
- **Lead, mercury, chromium and cadmium – toxic metals.**
- **Hydrogen cyanide – used in larger doses in gas chambers.**
- **Arsenic – plays an important role in developing heart disease.**
- **Formaldehyde – a substance used to embalm dead bodies.**
- **Ammonia – found in cleaning products and added to cigarettes to increase the nicotine hit.**
- **Polonium 210 – a radioactive substance.**



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**There are many places you can find out more information about tobacco and smoking, including health information and advice to quit. These include:**

### **Quitline**

Telephone service for smokers who want to quit **13 7848 (13 Quit)**

**[www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au)**

Provides information about smoking and quitting, including a downloadable quit phone app My QuitBuddy

**[www.yourhealth.gov.au](http://www.yourhealth.gov.au)**

Commonwealth government website with information about tobacco plain packaging and health warnings

**[www.oxygen.org.au](http://www.oxygen.org.au)**

Website for young people with information about smoking, tobacco and the tobacco industry

**[www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au](http://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au)**

An encyclopaedia of just about anything you ever wanted to know about smoking and ways to control it

## INTERNATIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

**The United States Office of the Surgeon General publishes two informative booklets:**

### **Health effects of smoking**

**[www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/tobaccosmoke/index.html](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/tobaccosmoke/index.html)**

### **Preventing smoking amongst young people**

**[www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/2012/consumer\\_booklet/pdfs/consumer.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2012/consumer_booklet/pdfs/consumer.pdf)**

Some state and territory based websites with information about smoking and quitting are listed below.

State/Territory	Website
New South Wales (I Can Quit)	<a href="http://www.icanquit.org.au">www.icanquit.org.au</a>
Queensland (QLD Health)	<a href="http://www.health.qld.gov.au/atod/prevention/quitline.asp">www.health.qld.gov.au/atod/prevention/quitline.asp</a>
Victoria (Quit Victoria)	<a href="http://www.quit.org.au">www.quit.org.au</a>
Western Australia (Cancer Council)	<a href="http://www.cancerwa.asn.au">www.cancerwa.asn.au</a>
Australian Capital Territory (Cancer Council)	<a href="http://www.actcancer.org">www.actcancer.org</a>
Northern Territory (NT Health)	<a href="http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Alcohol_and_Other_Drugs/Tobacco/Quitline">www.health.nt.gov.au/Alcohol_and_Other_Drugs/Tobacco/Quitline</a>
Tasmania (Quit TAS)	<a href="http://www.quittas.org.au">www.quittas.org.au</a>
South Australia (Quit SA)	<a href="http://www.quitsa.org.au">www.quitsa.org.au</a>

### Kids Helpline

Free, private and confidential telephone and online counselling service for young people aged 5–25 years.

**Tel 1800 55 1800**

### Lifeline

A 24 hour crisis help line. **Tel 13 11 14**. Also provides one-on-one crisis support online chat.

**[www.lifeline.org.au/Find-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat](http://www.lifeline.org.au/Find-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat)**

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