



Smoking and Your Heart

What smoking does to your heart

Cigarette smoke contains many chemicals that enter your body. Two of these substances are nicotine and carbon monoxide. They have a big effect on your heart and blood vessels. Smoking is a major risk factor for getting heart and blood vessel disease. The more you smoke, the greater your risk.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. today, and the leading cause of death for smokers as well. Cigarette smoking is directly linked to 30 percent of all heart disease deaths in the United States each year. Bottom line: Smoking is hard on the heart.

- Nicotine makes the heart work harder and need more oxygen:
- Heart rate increases.
- Blood pressure increases.
- Arteries narrow.
- Blood flow decreases.

Carbon monoxide reduces the amount of oxygen carried in the blood. Carbon monoxide and nicotine damage the walls of the arteries. Fatty deposits build up on the inner walls of arteries. The fatty deposits, called plaque, make arteries narrow. The heart has to work harder to pump blood through narrow blood vessels. This process is called hardening of the arteries. Another name is arteriosclerosis.

Benefits when you quit smoking

When you quit smoking, you get real benefits. After you stop smoking, your risk of cardio-vascular disease starts to decrease almost at once. This is true no matter what your age.

- Within 20 minutes after your last cigarette, your heart rate and blood pressure drop to your normal level.

- Within 8 hours, your carbon monoxide level drops. Your oxygen level rises to your normal level.
- Within 24 hours, your chance of heart attack starts to decrease.
- Within 1 month, your cholesterol levels can start to change. Former smokers and non-smokers have cholesterol levels that are similar.
- After you stop smoking, your risk of getting blood clots decreases.
- Within 1 year, your risk of heart attack is reduced more than 50 percent.
- Within several years, your risk of heart disease may be the same as that of a person who has never smoked.

Even if you've had a heart attack or have heart disease, you will benefit. When you quit smoking:

- After a heart attack, you reduce your chance of another heart attack by 50 percent.
- After coronary angioplasty, you greatly reduce your risk of death and future heart attacks. Angioplasty uses balloons to open clogged heart arteries.
- After heart bypass surgery, you reduce your risk of angina, heart attack, and a second bypass.

[It's never too late to quit smoking.](#)