

STUB IT OUT

The dangers of diabetes and smoking can be easily summarised in a single sentence, says Dr Kevin U. Chan, medical director, Hyberbaric and Occupational Medicine Pte Ltd – “Smoking is bad, and it is even worse when you have diabetes.” What are you to do? Stub out the habit before you get burned, he warns.

“Smoking is bad for you” may be such a clichéd message repeated ad nauseum, but its implications are real. Just take a look at the Surgeon General’s Warning on any cigarette case; they inform the buyer of very real health problems, such as lung cancer, miscarriage and heart disease, just to name a few. Worried? Read on.

What happens when a cigarette is lit?

Cigarettes, on the general, contain above 4000 chemical compounds, more than 400 of which are toxic. While a smoker inhales from a cigarette, it burns at 700°C at the tip and around 60°C in the core.¹ The heat breaks down the tobacco to produce various toxic substances. While the cigarette burns, the toxic residues concentrate towards the butt, and are eventually taken in through inhaling by the smoker.

The most damaging toxins include tar, a carcinogen, or chemical that induces cancer, nicotine, an addictive that increases cholesterol levels in the body, and carbon monoxide, which reduces oxygen in the body.

The problem with smoking as a diabetic

As you all may know, diabetes is essentially a condition where insulin is either not produced, or not utilised appropriately by the body. This ultimately leads to high blood sugar levels, as the sugar is not converted into energy that may be used by the body due to lack of insulin or insulin usage. This being so, nicotine, which increases cholesterol² levels, only adds to the already high blood sugar levels of the diabetic smoker, hence greatly worsening the condition.

Diabetic smokers are also more prone to cancer, through tar inhalation by smoking, as well as heart diseases, by gases in cigarette smoke that cause chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD). That’s not all. It gets even more bleak. There has also been evidence which suggests that cigarette smoking leads to microvascular disease in diabetes patients.

¹ Arch Environ Health. 1994 Mar-Apr;49(2):141-3.

² Effect of exogenous selenium on nicotine induced hyperlipidemia in rats.” By Sreekala S, Indira M, Apr-Jun 2008

Wish to quit smoking?

With that reality of the danger of smoking in place, surely diabetic smokers would realize and decide to quit smoking, for, no matter how much you abstain from sweet food and keep a healthy diet as a diabetic, a single cigarette can practically negate all your efforts to keep your blood sugar low.³

Of course, that doesn't mean non-diabetic smokers are safe from any health risks either; smoking is clogging up your arteries even as you read this article!

Besides preventing the worsening of the conditions above, there are multiple other benefits to quitting smoking, such as general improvement of health, sense of taste and smell, and heart efficiency.

Still not convinced? Well, let me put it this way. Say, you smoke 20 sticks per day. Assuming each pack of cigarettes is \$11, you actually spend \$330 a month. That's \$3,960 a year on something that is bad for you. In times of cutbacks and frugal spending, that amount of money can actually do wonders for those who require financial assistance.

Quitting smoking may not be an easy task, but there are a few measures you may take to help you quit:

1. Contact your doctor
2. Dial Quitline at 1800 438 2000 (<http://www.hpb.gov.sg>)
3. Nicotine Replacement Therapy
 - a) Nicotine patches, nasal spray and gum are three ways to curb cravings for cigarettes. Worn on the skin, the nicotine patch (between the neck and waist) supplies small amounts of nicotine. Nicotine gum allows the user to control the amount of nicotine he or she receives each day and should be used for 30 minutes at a time.
 - b) A prescription is required, if one were to buy a Nicotine nasal spray.
 - c) Zyban, is also another prescription medicine available to help you stop smoking.

Enquire about this nicotine replacement therapy from your doctor. Follow the directions on the package when using these products, and report any side effects to your healthcare provider. While using nicotine replacement products, you should not smoke as doing so can cause serious side effects.

More Tips to Stop Smoking

- Drink lots of liquids, preferably water, fruit juices or decaffeinated teas. Please resist the desire to drink coffee, soft drinks containing caffeine, and alcohol, as these can increase your urge to smoke.



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- Try doodling, knitting, strumming, etc. Whatever it is, keep your hands occupied. The main thing is to keep yourself busy.
- Opt for a low-calorie snack and juice or tea instead when you go for a 'coffee break'. Change your habits connected with smoking.
- Here is another trick: wrap a cigarette in a sheet of paper and then put a rubber band around it. You'll have more difficulty getting to one if you must reach for a cigarette. Once you are aware of your action, you will rewrap the cigarettes afterward, hopefully.
- Ask your family and co-workers who smoke not to do so around you. Tell all your friends that you are definitely quitting smoking. Ask them to help keep you from backsliding.
- Indulge in a bath or massage, or take a nap. Treat your body and soul with kindness. Listen to your favourite music or go see a movie. Enjoying these activities in the absence of smoking will help you realise that you do not need a cigarette to have a good time.
- Exercise, jogging and going to the gym improves the quality of life (QOL) in people in general. Those who exercised regularly reported improvements in all areas of quality of life: agility, energy, overall health, mental health, emotional well-being and functioning in social situations. Exercise gets the heart pumping, circulation moving, firms muscle tone and aids in weight control.

Exercise does not have to be over ambitious or strenuous to be beneficial. A daily walk, stretching and swimming are all great exercises that can give a feeling of well being and improve the overall quality of life.

Reference: tips and figures extracted from websites below:

- <http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=16695>
<http://quitsmoking.about.com/od/tobaccostatistics/a/cancerstats.htm>
<http://diabetes.webmd.com/diabetes-smoking-cessation-tips?page=2>
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez>

³ 2008;52(4):329-34. Epub 2008 Aug 19 **Al Mutairi SS, Mojiminiyi OA, Shihab-Eldeen AA, Al Sharafi A, Abdella N.** Department of Medicine, Kuwait University, Kuwait. san.mut@hsc.edu.kw