

The Dangers of Smoking for Young Women

Physical Impact

- Women become addicted to nicotine at lower levels of use, even though they smoke cigarettes with lower nicotine content and inhale less deeply. One study of 7th grade students found that girls at the same level of use as boys became dependent in three weeks, where it took the boys 26 weeks to become dependent.
- Nicotine leads to greater impairment of lung function for young women, and they have greater difficulty quitting.
- Smoking can interfere with normal menstruation.
- Women have more respiratory symptoms, headaches, neck and shoulder pain, stomach aches, nausea, nervousness, restlessness and sleep problems compared to non-smoking youth.
- Smoking increases the risk for painful menstruation and menstrual irregularities.
- Oral contraceptives increase the risk of coronary heart disease in female smokers, which is alarming since 40% of teenage girls who smoke use oral contraceptives.
- Lung cancer in 1987 surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women. This risk substantially increases for women smoking in early adolescence. Breasts are highly sensitive to carcinogens during puberty and early adolescence.
- Lung functioning is more impaired in girls. One study found higher rates of wheezing in girls.
- Girls report smoking a whole cigarette before age 13.
- High doses of nicotine have a depressive effect on the central nervous system, explaining why antidepressant medication helps nicotine addiction.
- Panic attacks may be caused by the breathing and lung problems that give a false sensation of suffocation, leading to the panic attacks and the development of phobias.

Behavior Impact

- Girls with difficult temperaments, who demonstrate poor adaptability, hyperactivity, insecurity or chronic negative moods, may have more problems with the interpersonal demands of adolescence and young adulthood.
- One study found that girls who were messy, sulky, dominating, jealous, unsharing and non-empathetic in nursery school were more likely to use drugs at age 14.
- Conduct disorder is related to an increased risk for substance use. Though conduct disorder is a disorder less common in girls, the risk of substance use and abuse is higher in conduct-disordered girls than boys. The risk is four times as great than in male counterparts with the same diagnosis.
- Girls with such problems may be at greater risk of peer rejection, attraction to deviant peer groups or more punitive responses from parents.

Weight Loss

- Dissatisfaction with body weight and attempts to control weight play an important part in promoting both eating disorders and substance abuse.
- The greatest tendency to diet occurs in middle school, when puberty and fashion's beauty ideal come into conflict.
- Girls who smoke eat fewer vegetables, fruits and dairy products and consume more high-saturated fats. There is significant decrease in exercise and physical activity.

Quitting May Be More Difficult for Women

- Girls are more vulnerable to the influence of peers to smoke and drink than boys. This may be because girls tend to spend more time with friends and to be more involved in their peers' lives.
- Girls who are susceptible to peer pressure or report experiencing peer pressure consume more substances.
- Popular girls are under more pressure than less popular girls to smoke cigarettes.
- Older girls are likelier to believe that smoking helps people relax and that it is easy to get addicted.
- Older girls believe vs. younger girls:
 - Older girls believe smokers/drinkers do well in school.
 - Older girls believe smoking helps people deal with boredom and depression.
- Favorable attitudes about smoking increase tobacco use across school transitions.

Marketing to Women

- The tobacco industry has a long history of targeting its marketing efforts to young women, exploiting their desire for independence and sophistication, and appealing to perennial concerns about weight and appearance, but rarely portrays the consequences.
- Teens spend 19-20 hours watching TV per week, and 4-5 hours listening to music and watching music videos. Youth between 12-20 purchase 26% of movie tickets.
- It used to be in the U.S. that a woman smoking was associated with loose morals, and in the 18th and 19th centuries, women were viewed as fallen women. But in the 20th century, public attitudes changed, and some of that can directly be attributed to marketing by tobacco companies.
- In 1926, Chesterfield marketed with a slogan "Blow some my way," and there was a 40% increase in sales.
- In 1967 to early 1970, advertising was placed in girl's magazines, and there was a major increase in smoking initiation for girls.
- With a Lucky Strike ad in 1925, there was a 200% increase in market share. "You've come a long way baby" by Virginia Slims played on women's liberation, "Slimmer, longer, not like those fat cigarettes men smoke," "Slim and sassy" and Capri's "The slimmest in town" played on women's desire to be thin.
- Smoking initiation increased rapidly in 1967 with aggressive marketing of women's brands of cigarettes—Lucky Strike: "Reach for a Luckys instead of a sweet;" Capri: "There's no slimmer way to smoke."

Taken from: *Pathways to Substance Abuse: The Formative Years for Young Women*
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