Smoking and your heart

Information for people who smoke and who already have coronary heart disease, and for their family and friends
Produced by
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Heart information line: 0845 0 70 80 70 for confidential information on a range of issues relating to heart disease

This booklet is one of the booklets in the Heart Information Series. For a complete list of booklets see page 25.

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This booklet is based on The QUIT Guide to Stopping Smoking, published by QUIT®.
About this booklet

This booklet is for people who smoke and who already have coronary heart disease. It:
• explains the risks of continuing to smoke
• offers some advice on how to stop smoking, and
• describes some of the ‘stop smoking aids’ that might help you.
It also gives information on the damage that smoking does to your heart and to many other aspects of your health.

This booklet is not a substitute for the advice your doctor, dietitian or cardiologist (heart specialist) may give you based on his or her knowledge of your condition.
The risks of continuing to smoke

If you have heart disease or have had a heart attack, you probably already know that smoking is bad for your heart, as well as for your lungs. Perhaps you have tried to quit already. But now you have an extra reason to stop smoking, because it is something positive you can do to improve your health and your quality of life. Stopping smoking is the single most important thing a smoker can do to live longer.

Even if you already have heart disease, it is definitely worth quitting.
- If you have already had a heart attack, continuing to smoke doubles your risk of having another attack within one year.
- If you are waiting to have coronary angioplasty or bypass surgery, your recovery will be quicker, and less painful, if you quit smoking as soon as possible before your operation.
- People who continue to smoke have more angina and may have to go into hospital more often.
- If you have been booked in to have surgery to relieve your angina, stopping smoking may relieve your angina so much that you may not need to have the operation.
There is no quick and easy way to quit. You have to want to stop smoking. This booklet concentrates on ways you can increase your chances of becoming ‘smoke-free’.

How stopping smoking will help your heart
Carbon monoxide and nicotine are the two chemicals in tobacco smoke that probably have the most effect on the heart. Carbon monoxide joins onto the red protein of the blood cell called haemoglobin, making it less able to carry oxygen to the heart and all other parts of the body. In some smokers, up to half of the blood can be carrying carbon monoxide instead of oxygen. This deprives the heart of vital oxygen. Nicotine stimulates the body to produce adrenaline which makes the heart beat faster and raises the blood pressure, causing the heart to work harder. Other parts of cigarette smoke appear to damage the lining of the coronary arteries and this leads to atherosclerosis (the build-up of fatty material within the walls of the arteries).

It is the tar in cigarettes that causes cancer. However, if a cigarette is low in tar it does not necessarily mean that it has less nicotine and carbon monoxide. So low-tar cigarettes can be just as harmful to your heart. Also, people who smoke
low-tar cigarettes tend to compensate by taking more puffs and inhaling more deeply. Just three or four extra puffs on a cigarette can transform a low-tar cigarette into a regular-strength cigarette.

**Blood cells of a non-smoker**

**Blood cells of a smoker**

Carbon monoxide from cigarette smoke joins onto the haemoglobin inside the red blood cell, reducing its ability to carry oxygen to the heart.