



Busting Myths about Smoking



Whether you have been diagnosed with COPD, or you're trying to prevent it, it's never too late to stop smoking. Tobacco smoking is the main cause of COPD. Breathing in tobacco smoke irritates the lungs. The lungs become inflamed and you may develop a cough. Ceasing to smoke is the most important thing you can do to help your lungs and improve your cough and phlegm production, and overall health. (1)

It's never too late to quit, so let's clear up a few common myths about smoking with Angela Radley O'Donovan, Acting Physiotherapist Manager MISCP, Co-Ordinator of Pulmonary Rehabilitation Programme and Smoking Cessation Advisor at Tipperary University Hospital, Clonmel.

MYTH: Smokers live just as long as non-smokers.

TRUTH: If you are a long-term smoker, on average, your life expectancy is about 10 years less than a non-smoker. Smoking is a leading risk factor for lung cancer, heart disease, stroke and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD, chronic bronchitis or emphysema). It is never too late to stop smoking – even if you already have COPD or heart disease, your outlook is much improved if you stop.

MYTH: People who smoke just a few days a week or just at some social gatherings sometimes think they'll escape the risks.

TRUTH: We know that smoking just one to four cigarettes a day doubles your risk of dying from heart disease.

MYTH: Even if you've smoked your whole life, it's worth it to stop.

TRUTH: If you quit at any age, you will improve your health and quality of life. Right away, your heart rate and blood pressure will go down, and your lungs will start to work better. The benefits of quitting smoking start within 24 hours and lasts a life time.

MYTH: E-cigarettes are a healthy choice.

TRUTH: They're definitely not harmless. Aerosols in e-cigarettes have damaging chemicals, including nicotine and ultrafine particles which you inhale into your lung. These flavourings are linked to lung disease. We don't know what the long-term effects are when people use e-cigarettes. Vaping may be less harmful than smoking normal cigarettes. "But safer is not the same as safe".

MYTH: Cigarettes made with different filters, paper, or blends of tobacco used to be labelled as light, ultralight, or mild. So some people bought them thinking they were better for them.

TRUTH: But that's not the case. You can get just as much tar from smoking a light cigarette as a regular one.

MYTH: Smoking only affects you.

TRUTH: Whenever you light up, second hand smoke is produced. The smoker only inhales about 15% of the smoke from a cigarette. The other 85% is absorbed into the atmosphere or inhaled by those around you. This isn't just unpleasant, it can be a killer. Second hand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, many of which are irritants and toxins, and more than 50 are known carcinogens. People who breathe in second hand smoke are at risk of the same diseases as smokers, including cancer, stroke, lung and heart disease. Children are especially vulnerable as they have less well-developed airways and immune systems. They are at risk of bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma attacks, meningitis and ear infections. Babies exposed to second hand smoke have a higher risk of cot death.

MYTH: Stopping smoking always makes you put on weight.

TRUTH: Cigarettes do affect your appetite and your metabolism, and they dull your taste buds, so people often gain a few pounds when they give up. However if you've stopped smoking you'll have more energy and will find it easier to be active. By doing more exercise and staying away from high calorie foods you can prevent any weight gain. In addition by stopping smoking food will taste much better.

MYTH: Smoking helps you deal with stress and anxiety.

TRUTH: Smoking actually increases anxiety and tension. Nicotine creates an immediate sense of relaxation so people smoke in the belief that it reduces stress and anxiety. This feeling is temporary and soon gives way to withdrawal symptoms and increased cravings and actually increases the physical stress on your body. You start to “need” a cigarette to control the nicotine withdrawal symptoms - it does not reduce your stress levels or deal with the underlying causes. Non-smokers usually have lower stress levels than smokers. You’ll feel much healthier once you quit smoking and this can help reduce your stress levels.

MYTH: Roll-up cigarettes are healthier than normal cigarettes.

TRUTH: Roll-ups are just as bad for you as ordinary cigarettes and expose smokers to 4,000 toxic chemicals, many of which are carcinogenic and poisonous. They can result in the same health risks, including cancer, stroke, heart and lung disease, impotence, infertility and even amputation. Nicotine and tar yields are actually higher in roll-ups than in most ordinary cigarettes - and many people who smoke roll-ups don’t use a filter, so they end up inhaling more tar and nicotine and therefore are more likely to become addicted to the cigarettes.

1 in every 2 smokers will die of a tobacco related disease – but it doesn’t have to be that way. Your advisor will help you make the right Quit plan for you to stop smoking. They can help you choose a Nicotine replacement therapy treatment to stop smoking. Your carbon monoxide levels are continuously monitored during the face to face behavioral support programme.

Call the Quit team on Freephone 1800 201 203 /free text QUIT to 50100.

Join the living QUIT smoking!

Sources:

(1) copd.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/COPD-Me-Booklet-2021.pdf

(2) Angela Radley O’Donovan, Acting Physiotherapist Manager MISCOP, Co-Ordinator of Pulmonary Rehabilitation Programme and Smoking Cessation Advisor at Tipperary University Hospital, Clonmel.