

# SMOKING AND OVERALL HEALTH



**This fact sheet is for public health officials and others who are interested in the effects of smoking on overall health. The single largest cause of preventable disease and death is smoking; people who want healthy lives should not smoke. Nearly half a million Americans die prematurely from tobacco use each year. Another 16 million Americans suffer from at least one serious disease caused by smoking.**

On average, compared to people who have never smoked, smokers suffer for years with more health problems due to their smoking and ultimately die earlier by a decade or more than nonsmokers.

In fact, smokers generally are much less healthy than nonsmokers.

- Smokers' overall health is worse and they are sick more often than nonsmokers.
- Smokers need to go to the doctor more often and they are admitted to the hospital more often than nonsmokers.
- Smokers miss more work than do nonsmokers. This costs American businesses, and American workers who smoke, billions of dollars every year.

## SMOKING AND THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Smoking harms the immune system and can make the body less successful at fighting disease. The immune system is the body's way of protecting itself from infection and disease; it works to fight everything from cold and flu viruses to serious conditions such as cancer.

Additionally, smoking is known to compromise the equilibrium, or balance, of the immune system. This increases the risk for several immune and autoimmune disorders (conditions caused when the immune system mistakenly attacks the body's healthy cells and tissues). New evidence finds that smoking is a cause of rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks the joints and causes swelling and pain.

People with rheumatoid arthritis have a harder time getting around and doing normal daily activities. Smoking also interferes with the effectiveness of certain treatments for rheumatoid arthritis.

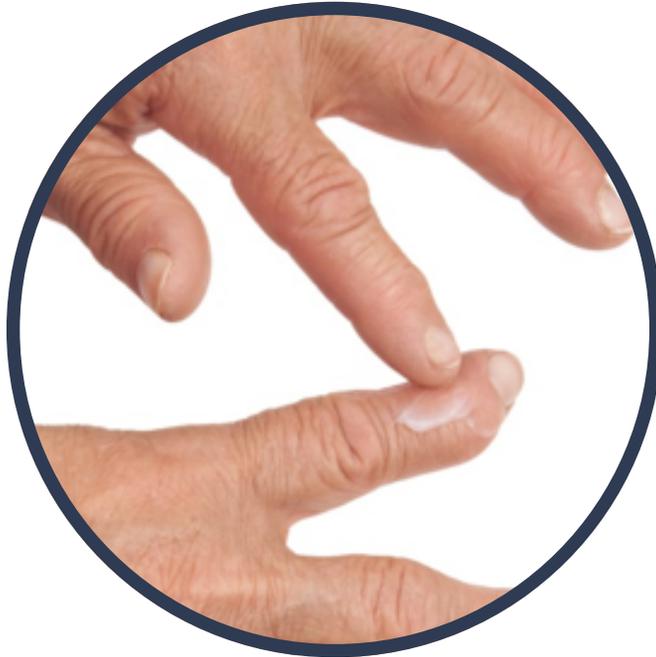
## CHEMICALS AND DISEASE

Cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemical compounds. Many of them can interfere with the immune system. Diseases are able to progress when the immune system is not working effectively. Diseases that can be worsened by smoking include:

- viral and bacterial infections, especially of the lungs (for example, pneumonia, influenza, tuberculosis);
- periodontal or gum disease;
- bacterial meningitis (a disease that attacks the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord);
- infections that occur after surgery;
- rheumatoid arthritis;
- Crohn's disease (a serious disease of the digestive system); and
- cancer.

Let your clients know that people who want healthy lives should not smoke. Smokers lose quality of life as well as years of life. Smokers who want to quit can get help from their doctors. Free help is also available by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW or by going to [smokefree.gov](http://smokefree.gov) or [cdc.gov/tips](http://cdc.gov/tips).

# CHEMICALS AND DISEASE



CIGARETTE SMOKE CONTAINS  
**MORE THAN 7,000**  
CHEMICALS AND CHEMICAL COMPOUNDS

---

Most people find a combination of resources works best. Many smokers do not quit on their first attempt. Many need several tries to successfully quit. But the benefits are well worth it. Keep trying.

**RESOURCES  
FOR  
QUITTING**

- 
- Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW.
  - [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)
  - [www.cdc.gov/tips](http://www.cdc.gov/tips)



Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
Office on Smoking  
and Health