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Smoking or Health

The Department of Health and Human Services recently reported to Congress on the health consequences of smoking. Cigarette smoking is the major single cause of cancer mortality in the United States. Of all deaths caused by cancer in America, tobacco is responsible for approximately 30%. This means that 129,000 Americans are likely to die of cancer this year because of the higher overall cancer death rates for smokers compared with nonsmokers.

Cigarette smokers have total cancer death rates that are 2 times greater than those who are nonsmokers. Heavy smokers (more than one pack a day) have a 3-4 times greater excess risk of cancer mortality.

LUNG CANCER and SMOKING

Cigarette smoking is the major cause of lung cancer in the United States. Approximately 85% of all cases of lung cancer in the United States are due to cigarette smoking. In 1982, it is estimated that 80,000 men and 31,000 women will die of lung cancer. The lung cancer death rate for women is currently rising faster than that for men, reflecting the more recent adoption of smoking by large numbers of women. If current trends continue, the lung cancer death rate for women will soon surpass that of breast cancer, currently the leading cause of cancer mortality in women.

The five year survival rate for lung cancer is less than 10% and has not changed appreciably in over 15 years.

Recent epidemiologic studies have shown correlations between involuntary smoking or passive smoking and lung cancer in nonsmokers. Currently, the nature of the association is unresolved, but it raises the concern that involuntary smoking may pose a carcinogenic risk to the nonsmokers.

Cigarette smoking is a major cause of cancer of the larynx, oral cavity, and esophagus. An estimate 40,000 individuals will develop laryngeal and oral cancer this year in the United States. 8,300 deaths are expected to occur due to cancer of the esophagus.

Cigarette smoking is a contributory factor for the development of cancer of the bladder, pancreas, and kidney. An association exists between smoking and cancer of the stomach.

CESSATION OF SMOKING

Although cigarette smoking is a cause of many forms of cancer, encouraging facts are presented in this report. Even after many years of cigarette smoking, stopping smoking reduces cancer risk substantially compared with that of continuing smoking. The more years one refrains from smoking cigarettes after stopping, the greater the reduction in excess cancer risk.

THERE IS NO SINGLE ACTION AN INDIVIDUAL CAN TAKE TO REDUCE THE RISK OF CANCER MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN TO STOP SMOKING - PARTICULARLY SMOKING CIGARETTES.

Reference: Office on Smoking and Health. The health consequences of smoking: cancer. A report of the Surgeon General. Rockville, Maryland: Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1982. Copies of the full report can be obtained by writing to: Office on Smoking And Health, Park Building, Room 1-58, 5600 Fishers' Lane, Rockville, Maryland 20857

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