Secondhand Smoke (Passive Smoking)

Secondhand smoke is smoke given off by a burning cigarette, cigar, or pipe, and the smoke exhaled by smokers. When a cigarette is smoked, about half of the smoke is inhaled and exhaled by the smoker, and the other half floats around in the air. Exposure to secondhand smoke is also called involuntary smoking or passive smoking. People can be exposed to secondhand smoke in:

- Homes.
- Cars.
- Workplace.
- Public places (bars, restaurants, other recreation sites).

Exposure to this smoke is hazardous because it contains more than 250 harmful chemicals, including at least 60 that can cause cancer. These chemicals include:

- Arsenic (heavy metal toxin) benzene (chemical found in gasoline).
- Beryllium (toxic metal).
- Cadmium (metal used in batteries).
- Chromium (metallic element).
- Ethylene oxide (chemical used to sterilize medical devices).
- Nickel (metallic element).
- Polonium–210 (chemical element that gives off radiation).
- Vinyl chloride (toxic substance used in plastics manufacture).

Nonsmoking spouses and family members of smokers have higher rates of cancer, heart disease and serious respiratory illnesses than those not exposed to secondhand smoke.

- Nicotine, cotinine (nicotine by-product), carbon monoxide, and other evidence of secondhand smoke exposure have been found in the body fluids of nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Living with a smoker increases a nonsmoker’s chances of developing lung cancer by 20 to 30 percent.
- Secondhand smoke may increase the risk of breast cancer, nasal sinus cavity cancer, cervical cancer, bladder cancer, and nasopharyngeal (nose and throat) cancer in adults.
- Secondhand smoke may increase the risk of heart disease by 25 to 30 percent.

Children are especially at risk from secondhand smoke exposure. **Children of smokers have higher rates of:**

- Pneumonia.
- Asthma.
- Smoking.
- Bronchitis.
- Colds.
- Chronic cough.
- Ear infections.
- Tonsillitis.
- School absences.

Research suggests that exposure to secondhand smoke may cause leukemia, lymphoma and brain tumors in children.

Babies are three times more likely to die from SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome), if their mothers smoked during and after pregnancy.

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Studies have shown that even low levels of exposure can be harmful. The only way to fully protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke exposure is to completely eliminate smoking in indoor spaces. **The best thing you can do for your own health and for your children's health is to stop smoking.** You should **stop as soon as possible**. This is not easy, and you may fail several times at quitting before you get free of this addiction. Nicotine replacement therapy (patches, gum, lozenges) can help. These therapies can help you deal with the physical symptoms of withdrawal. Attending stop smoking support groups can help you deal with the emotional issues of quitting smoking.

Even if you are not ready to quit right now, there are some simple changes you can make to reduce the effect of your smoking on your family:

- Do not smoke in your home. Smoke away from your home in an open area, preferably outside.
- Ask others to not smoke in your home.
- Do not smoke while holding a child or when children are near.
- Do not smoke in your car.
- Avoid restaurants, day care centers, and other places that allow smoking.

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