



Every packet of cigarettes has not only a surgeon's warning on it, but also photographic evidence of the damage smoking can cause. Yet, in spite of every cough and sore throat, smokers continue to deny smoking's impact on their health. The addictive properties of cigarettes are well established, but it is arguable whether the physical addiction is more powerful than the psychological aspects of smoking. **Mira Khreino** takes an honest look at the dangers of smoking and options for kicking the habit once and for all.

LET'S CLEAR THE AIR



Everyone knows that smoking is unhealthy, but it can be easy to forget just how damaging this bad habit can be. People are often also in denial about the fact that the harm from a cigarette extends far beyond the smoker. Secondhand smoke exposure increases the risk of heart disease and lung cancer in non-smokers and respiratory infections in children. Unfortunately, local statistics show that roughly 61 percent of Jordanian households have at least one regular smoker and 60 percent of children are exposed to tobacco through secondhand smoke.

In 2007, Jordan's Behavioral Risk Factor Survey found that 29 percent of adults are cigarette smokers. Two years later, Jordan's Global Youth Tobacco Survey found that, sadly, most smokers pick up the addiction before the age of 18, with 11.5 percent of school students having already established the bad habit.

THE UGLY TRUTH

Smoking is one of the leading causes of preventable diseases. The facts are well known: smoking harms the lungs and the heart, impedes circulation, reduces kidney function, weakens the esophagus, and causes stomach ulcers and gum disease. However, the negative effects of smoking extend to nearly every organ and system in the body, some of which you would not expect to be damaged by a cigarette habit. Premature aging, for example, is common in smokers. A restricted amount of oxygen

to the skin results in a sallow, grey, and dull complexion, adding 10 to 20 years to biological age. Smokers may have up to three times the amount of wrinkles around the mouth and eyes, as well as an amplified appearance of cellulite. Smokers are more likely to suffer not only from lung cancer, but also kidney, cervical, and testicular cancers, while their chance of stroke increases by up to 50 percent by way of developing a brain aneurysm. Brain aneurysms can result in extensive brain damage and even death, but it only takes two years of quitting smoking for the risk of stroke to half. Smoking can also wreak havoc on people's sex lives. It damages the blood supply to the penis, resulting in potential male impotence and reducing sperm count. Smoking can also reduce fertility in women and increase time needed to conceive — on average, by over a year. Both men and women who smoke may have difficulty achieving orgasm and smoking during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, premature birth, and stillbirth.

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IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO QUIT

The benefits of stopping smoking are numerous and varied. No matter what age you quit, you're reducing risk of serious disease. Nevertheless, the sooner one stops smoking the greater the benefit. About 10 years after quitting, the risk of lung cancer falls to half that of a smoker and the risk of heart attack to the same level as someone who has never smoked! Here are some of the other long-term benefits of switching to the non-smoking section:

- Within nine months of quitting smoking, lung capacity improves by 10 percent. As lung capacity naturally decreases with age, smoking could make the difference between wheezing and coughing when going out for a walk or leading an active and healthy life.
- Half of all long-term smokers die early from smoking-related diseases, including heart disease, lung cancer, and chronic bronchitis. Quitting by 30 adds 10 years to life and kicking the habit by 60 adds three years to life.



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- Smokers are constantly craving nicotine, which raises stress levels. Withdrawal between cigarettes keeps smokers in an anxious state, and this cycle of smoking-withdrawal-anxiety-craving-stress-smoking is on a perpetual repeat. Ex-smokers free from this smoking-induced stress have better concentration and better mental health in general.
- The senses of taste and smell drastically improve when one quits, as the body is no longer dulled by the thousands of toxins contained in cigarettes.
- Nowadays, smoking is generally considered quite unattractive, as opposed to the sexy allure it once had. In fact, a recent survey found that non-smokers were considered three times more attractive to potential partners.
- Stopping smoking improves blood flow to the sex organs, leading to better sex. It also helps fertility, increasing the possibility of pregnancy and reducing the likelihood of miscarriage.
- Quitting slows the rate of aging back down and delays the appearance of wrinkles, as well as improves the color and complexion of the skin by supplying a richer blood flow filled with nutrients and oxygen. Fresher breath and whiter teeth are also a welcomed byproduct of stopping smoking.
- Smoking cessation improves circulation to the muscles, making physical activities such as running much easier. Overall energy levels improve.
- Smoking depresses immune function, making people more susceptible to colds and the flu. Quitting smoking better equips the immune system to ward off such illnesses.
- Smoking harms not only the smoker, but also the smoker's friends and family. By quitting, one protects the health of their loved ones. Shockingly, children of smoking parents have three times the risk of getting lung cancer later in life than those of non-smoking parents. The passive inhalation of smoke also doubles children's risk of croup, bronchitis, asthma, and pneumonia.
- Saving money is another advantageous result of quitting smoking. The average smoker has 13 cigarettes a day, equivalent to 364 cigarettes a month. If you are a smoker, take a moment to calculate how much could be saved by quitting and to reflect on how appreciative charitable causes would be to receive that amount!

CURB YOUR CRAVINGS

Two thirds of smokers want to quit smoking. While some people have been able to quit relatively easily, others have found it very difficult and have attempted many times without success. A steel determination and strong willpower are essential to dealing with the potential struggle involved in quitting. Many nicotine-containing aids are now readily available as replacements to tobacco cigarettes. This nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) comes as inhalers, patches, gum, sprays, tablets, and lozenges. And while some people have benefited greatly from NRT, others have found prescription medication such as bupropion or varenicline helpful. However, please note that these medications have contraindications and that a full medical



history and assessment need to be taken by a medical professional before the drugs can be prescribed.

Electronic cigarettes have also been gaining popularity in recent years. Designed to feel like smoking, a vaporized solution is inhaled and smoke is blown out of the mouth to imitate the sensation of smoking. Some contain nicotine and others are free of the drug, but recent studies show that e-cigarettes are as effective as NRT. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the other potential and unexplored effects of e-cigarettes.

DEALING WITH WITHDRAWAL

The first few weeks of quitting are the most difficult. After eight to 12 weeks, the "quitter" has mostly gotten used to their new non-smoking lifestyle, and unpleasant withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, anxiety, and cravings, will have subsided. At this difficult time, remind yourself that these symptoms are temporary while the benefits of quitting are permanent. While going through the struggle of coming off the drug, repeat to yourself the reasons for quitting in the first place. Writing the reasons down and revisiting the list when times get tough could be of great help. Remember, withdrawal symptoms cause but a mere fraction of discomfort compared to the potential diseases and illness continuing smoking can potentially cause. Remember, you are not the only one who goes through these symptoms. It is all a part of the process of cleansing your body of nicotine and it is the greatest gift you can give yourself!

- Failure at quitting is highest in the first two weeks. If you foresee that the process of becoming cigarette- and nicotine-free might be challenging,

seeking support can be instrumental to success. Physical symptoms of withdrawal include tingling of hands and feet, sweating, cramps, nausea, headache, and cold symptoms. These symptoms should be treated as if recovering from an illness.

- Mental and emotional withdrawal symptoms can be worse than the actual physical aspect. Infant emotions such as temper tantrums, neediness, and feelings of dependency are commonplace and insomnia, mental confusion, irritability, anxiety, and even depression are often experienced.
- Anger and mood swings are part and parcel of the quitting process. Accept them as such and deal with them safely by venting to others without losing control. Using calming breathing exercises such as counting to ten slowly may help.
- Boredom is another feeling one may experience upon quitting, so keep yourself (and your hands especially) busy. Read, cook, sew, do the dishes, run errands, and work your hands in some way. One can even roll a piece of paper and use it instead of a cigarette; the deep clean breaths will benefit the lungs, the long inhales and exhales will calm the mind, and the grip will busy the hands.
- The actual physical addiction to nicotine is most intense and frequent in the first two to three days after quitting. The actual craving pang is short-lived and lasts three to five minutes each time; give it a few minutes and the feeling will pass.
- Many people experience bowel movement changes and constipation as a result of quitting. This can be remedied by drinking plenty of fluids, eating roughage, and doing exercise.
- It's very important to encourage yourself at this difficult point, especially as it would be very easy to bring yourself down while feeling so vulnerable. Being defeatist and doubting your ability to stay smoke-free does nothing for your confidence. It's normal to go through irritability, anger, and loss of control; you are weaning yourself off a powerful and addictive drug. Talk to supportive friends or family when you feel particularly down.
- Fatigue is understandable for the first month after quitting as nicotine is a stimulant. Exercise increases energy levels as does a good night's sleep. Drink plenty of water to help the healing process.
- Headaches and dizziness are frequent complaints. Dizziness is often due to the increased oxygen supply to the brain, while headaches are due to nicotine withdrawal itself. Take a warm bath, try calming breathing techniques, and cut down on caffeinated drinks.



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- Experiencing tightness in the chest is commonplace. This may be due to sore muscles from coughing or tension in the body from the withdrawal. Please be patient with yourself and appreciate that the body is trying to find its natural state again.
- Be aware of cigarette triggers, or situations in which you would usually reach for a smoke. Plan ahead and have gum or a toothpick handy, or plan an activity (such as going for a walk) for those times. Pre-empt the craving and replace it with something else. Busy and distract yourself.
- Weight gain is a major fear for many, but understanding the reasons behind it might help to prevent it. For months or years, a smoker's mouth has been constantly stimulated. This stimulation has become a habit. Upon quitting, the stimulation ceases, so the smoker looks for that stimulation elsewhere and grabs food. This confusion can be partially remedied by drinking water, chewing gum, playing with a toothpick, or having low-calorie low-fat snacks on hand such as carrots or celery sticks. An average weight gain of 4.5 kilograms over six months is normal. It is important not to let this be a deterrent from quitting. This extra weight is much safer than continuing smoking!

GETTING THE HELP YOU NEED

Many methods have been introduced as means of tobacco control in Jordan. In addition to banning the promotion and advertisement of cigarettes, youth-targeted campaigns have been launched on the harmful effects of smoking, and smoking has been limited to specific and limited areas (with fines and even prison sentences threatening those who violate the rules). The Kingdom has also worked on developing public awareness of local smoking cessation services.

In 2008, the Tobacco Control Unit at the King Hussein Cancer Centre (KHCC) opened its Smoking Cessation Clinic with the vision of reducing the prevalence of cancer through tobacco control and an effective “quit smoking” program. The clinic helps around 120 new patients per year to go smoke-free. Services include medication and counseling, a personalized quit plan, and relapse counseling. The clinic operates two days per week, on Saturdays and Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Two further clinics have opened in Irbid and Karak in order to grant the population the support it needs to kick the habit, both of which are open every Sunday and Tuesday. The clinic also administers complimentary nicotine replacement treatment to those adamant on quitting smoking. ■