UNC PHYSICIANS NETWORK
UNC HEALTH CARE
CAROLINA ADVANCED HEALTH

Smoking and Heart Disease Risk

The chemicals in tobacco smoke harm your heart and blood vessels in many ways. For example, they:

- Thicken your blood and make it harder for your blood to carry oxygen.
- Increase your blood pressure and heart rate, making your heart work harder than normal.
- Lower your HDL cholesterol (sometimes called "good" cholesterol) and raise your LDL cholesterol (sometimes called "bad" cholesterol). Smoking also increases your triglyceride level. Triglycerides are a type of fat found in the blood.
- Disturb normal heart rhythms.
- Damage blood vessel walls, making them stiff and less elastic (stretchy). This damage narrows the blood vessels and adds to the damage caused by unhealthy cholesterol levels.
- Contribute to inflammation, which may trigger plaque buildup in your arteries.

Any amount of smoking, even light smoking or occasional smoking, damages the heart and blood vessels. For some people, such as women who use birth control pills and people who have diabetes, smoking poses an even greater risk to the heart and blood vessels.

Secondhand smoke also can harm the heart and blood vessels. Secondhand smoke is the smoke that comes from the burning end of a cigarette, cigar, or pipe. Secondhand smoke also refers to smoke that's breathed out by a person who is smoking.

Secondhand smoke contains many of the same harmful chemicals that people inhale when they smoke. Secondhand smoke can damage the hearts and blood vessels of people who don't smoke in the same way that active smoking harms people who do smoke. Secondhand smoke greatly increases adults' risk of heart attack and death. It also puts children and teens at greater risk for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or asthma.

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Benefits of Quitting Smoking and Avoiding Secondhand Smoke

One of the best ways to reduce your risk of heart disease is to avoid tobacco smoke. Don't ever start smoking. If you already smoke, quit. No matter how much or how long you've smoked, quitting will benefit you. Also, try to avoid secondhand smoke. Don't go to places where smoking is allowed. Ask friends and family members who smoke not to do it in the house and car. Quitting smoking will reduce your risk of developing and dying from heart disease. Over time, quitting also will lower your risk of atherosclerosis and blood clots.

Source: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/smo/printall-index.html

Carolina Advanced Health has a program to help you quit. Our care manager and pharmacist work together with each patient to find the treatments that will help each individual quit and stay tobacco free. Ask for an appointment to meet with our care manager to learn more.