

"I was 13 years old when I first lit a cigarette and dragged smoke deep into my lungs. Yes, I knew smoking could cause lung cancer. But I felt immortal and thought, "Oh well, I've got my whole life to quit...". Then I started struggling to breathe. I had developed asthma because of my smoking and was forced to go on steroids. Had I known as a teenager that the high levels of carbon monoxide I inhaled from cigarettes could damage me so badly, I'd have kicked the butt much earlier!" - Sorry Smoker, 20

This is a sad story, but it's one of the better ones. Cigarette smoking is linked to lung and other cancers, strokes, heartdisease, emphysema, tuberculosis, bronchitis, mental impairment, gastro-intestinal disorders, hearing loss, taste impairment, eye problems, headaches, premature ageing... and the list goes on. Studies have also shown that smoking can trigger depression and other anxiety disorders in teens, as well as self-destructive behaviour.

What's interesting is that 90% of adult smokers started before they were 16. So if you don't smoke in your teens, you probably never will. Thank goodness.

But experts predict that 30-40% of the 2.3 billion children and teens worldwide will become smokers in early adult life. And 250 million of these future smokers will be killed by smoking! Can you even imagine 250 million dead people? That's more than 5 times the whole population of South Africa!

Unfortunately most kids say at age 10 that they'll never smoke, but by 12 or 13 they've tried it because:

- their friends are trying it
- they're curious
- they think they look cool
- it helps them to 'relax'
- they're surrounded by smokers like family members and friends

Don't fall into this trap!

- Cigarettes are made up of tobacco, tar, carbon monoxide and nicotine! Who wants to inhale that stuff anyway?
- Smoking is personally and socially undesirable. It's rude. Smelly. Dirty. Bad for your teeth, breath and skin. And bad for your health.
- Contrary to false beliefs, tobacco is not good for stress reduction, weight loss or making friends. There are other (healthier) ways to do all of these things.
- Snuff is tobacco powder that people put up their noses to get a 'head rush'. It's just as addictive as cigarettes and can cause all of the illnesses associated with smoking, except that it also damages the septum (the inside of the nose).
- Most people who start smoking think they'll never get addicted. But the nicotine in tobacco is as addictive as heroin and 8 out of 10 teens get hooked.
- Smoking takes away free choice and removes free will. Particularly when you want to quit. Do you really want to lose control over a part of your life? No? Then have the courage to reject harmful behaviours.
- Tobacco companies want you to see smoking as fashionable, sexy and fun. Why? Because they need new customers. So if you want to rebel against anyone, resist the lure of tobacco companies. They make tons of money by convincing you to smoke. And it's crazy to pay someone money to ruin your lungs, your heart and your life!

Remember: Tobacco kills when used as directed!

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