



Smoke Signals

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Smoking: How does it cause wrinkles?

Most wrinkles are due to age-related changes in the skin. Heredity plays a major role in the degree of skin aging and wrinkling. But environmental factors, such as sun exposure and exposure to cigarette smoke can accelerate this aging process.

Smoking reduces blood flow to the skin and decreases the amount of vitamins in the skin, such as vitamin A. These factors increase damage to elastic fibers and collagen in the skin from sun exposure. It's also possible that repeated exposure to the heat from a burning cigarette may also damage facial skin over time.

These skin changes can be seen in young adults with only a 10-year smoking history.

Oral and Throat Cancer

Recently, you've noticed a pale lump inside your mouth that doesn't seem to be healing. It's not like anything you've seen before. What you may have encountered is an early sign of oral or throat cancer.

The American Cancer Society estimates more than 28,000 new cases of oral and throat (oropharyngeal) cancer occur annually in the United States. Oral cancer includes cancer of the lips, mouth, tongue, gums and salivary glands. Throat cancer involves cancer of the part of the throat just behind the mouth. An estimated more than 7,000 Americans die of these cancers annually.

Periodic self-examination of your mouth is the best way to detect the early signs of oral cancer. And, when detected early, oral cancer is almost always successfully treated.

Unfortunately, many oral and upper throat cancers are far advanced by the time a doctor is made aware of the situation. This is because oral and throat cancers are usually painless in their early stages.

Emphysema

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a general term for a group of diseases that cause progressive damage to your lungs. These diseases include chronic bronchitis, asthma and emphysema. Of the more than 16 million Americans with COPD, nearly 3 million have symptomatic emphysema and millions more are in the early stages of the disease before signs and symptoms appear.

When emphysema is advanced, you must work so hard to expel air from your lungs that breathing can consume up to 20 percent of your resting energy. Unfortunately, because emphysema develops gradually over many years, you may not experience symptoms such as shortness of breath until irreversible damage has already occurred. Treatments focus on relieving symptoms and avoiding complications.

The main symptoms of emphysema are shortness of breath and a reduced capacity for physical activity, both of which are likely to become worse as the disease progresses. In time, you may have trouble breathing even when lying down, and it may be especially hard to breathe during and after respiratory infections, such as colds or the flu.

Cigarette smoke is by far the most common cause of emphysema. The damage begins when tobacco smoke temporarily paralyzes the microscopic hairs (cilia) that line your bronchial tubes. Normally, these hairs sweep irritants and germs out of your airways. But when smoke interferes with this sweeping movement, irritants remain in your bronchial tubes and infiltrate the alveoli, inflaming the tissue and eventually breaking down elastic fibers.

The single greatest risk factor for emphysema is smoking. Emphysema is most likely to develop in cigarette smokers, but cigar and pipe smokers also are susceptible, and the risk for all types of smokers increases with the number of years and amount of tobacco smoked. Men are affected more often than women are, but this statistic is changing as more women take up smoking.

Ready to stop smoking? Call 894-2408 for more tips to help you quit!