Smoking Tobacco and HIV

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If you have HIV or AIDS and smoke cigarettes, you put extra stress on your body. Smoking weakens your immune system, making it harder to fight off deadly infections like fungal thrush, oral hairy leukoplakia (caused by the Epstein-Barre virus), as well as various types of pneumonia. Nicotine, a chemical found in tobacco leaves, is an addictive substance. In addition to nicotine, every single cigarette contains an estimated 4,800 harmful chemicals, including 11 proven to cause cancer in humans. Some of the chemicals found in cigarettes are:

- Acetone -- found in nail polish remover.
- Ammonia -- household cleaner.
- Formaldehyde -- used to embalm dead bodies.
- Arsenic -- used in rat poison.
- Tar -- used in paving roads.
- Carbon monoxide -- poisonous gas released in car exhaust fumes.
- Cadmium -- main ingredient in battery acid.

Health Effects of Smoking

Many of the adverse health effects caused by smoking are aggravated by HIV. Smoking increases your risk of heart disease, a heart attack or a stroke. Some HIV medications can raise the amount of fats and cholesterol in your blood, increasing the chances of developing these problems. People with HIV also may get sores and infections like thrush or herpes inside the mouth and on the tongue and lips. Smoking aggravates these situations, making dental problems, gum disease and mouth cancer more common. In addition, people with HIV who smoke get lung cancer, emphysema, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), pneumonia and other lung infections more often than smokers who do not have HIV. Finally, smoking weakens your immune system, undermining the effects of your HIV medications.

MSM and Smoking
Men who have sex with men are disproportionately more likely to smoke cigarettes than their heterosexual counterparts. The rate is an estimated 55.9 percent higher among MSM. The reasons for this are varied and include: anxiety stemming from homophobia and discrimination, increased rates of alcohol use and other behaviors related to smoking, social norms that accept smoking and direct advertising to the LGBT communities by tobacco companies.

**Some Tips on Quitting**

Quitting smoking has many health benefits. Twelve hours after quitting, carbon monoxide levels in your body drop to normal. One year after quitting, your added risk of heart disease is half that of a smoker's. And five years after quitting, your risk of a stroke is now similar to those who have never smoked.

Set a quit date. Get rid of all tobacco materials around you, and tell your family and friends to please not smoke around you. You can also seek counseling and talk to your medical provider about nicotine replacement therapy products. Once you have quit smoking, stay busy -- exercise, clean your home, drink lots of water and change the habits that used to make you want to smoke. If you relapse, think about what caused you to light up again, and try to stay away from those situations. DO NOT GIVE UP -- Try again!

**Resources to Help Smokers Quit**

**The California Smokers Helpline (1-800-NO-BUTTS)** is a free state-wide telephone service that helps people quit smoking tobacco. The helpline offers six free one-on-one cessation services over the phone with a trained counselor. Services are available in English (1-800-662-8887), Spanish (1-800-456-6386), and other languages. You can also visit the CA Smokers’ Helpline Web site for additional information.

**For those in the U.S. living outside of California, the National QUIT LINE is 1-800-QUIT-NOW**, and their Web site is [http://www.becomeanex.org/](http://www.becomeanex.org/). The Web site is very interactive and can be used by anyone in the world. What are you waiting for?
References

1. American Lung Association of California.

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http://www.thebody.com/content/art57390.html