

SMOKING CESSATION

About 48 million Americans smoke cigarettes, but most smokers are either actively trying to quit or want to quit. Since 1965, more than 40 percent of all adults who have ever smoked have quit.

AHA Scientific Position

According to the 1990 Surgeon General's Report, *The Health Benefits of Smoking Cessation*, eliminating smoking can greatly reduce the occurrence of coronary heart disease and other forms of cardiovascular disease. The report also states that quitting smoking reduces the risk of repeat heart attacks and death from heart disease by 50 percent or more.

Smoking cessation is important in the medical management of many contributors to heart attack. These include atherosclerosis (fatty buildups in arteries), thrombosis (blood clots), coronary artery spasm and cardiac arrhythmia (heart rhythm problems). Quitting smoking also can help manage several other disorders, especially arteriosclerotic peripheral vascular disease (fatty buildups in peripheral arteries) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

According to the 2000 Surgeon General's Report, tobacco smoking remains the No. 1 cause of preventable disease and death in the United States.

About 23 percent of adults age 18 and older smoke. This figure is down considerably from 42 percent in 1965. Changes in smoking habits during the late 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s have very likely contributed to the drop in cardiovascular deaths that occurred at the same time in the United States.

The 1990 Surgeon General's Report includes these findings:

- After one year off cigarettes, the excess risk of heart disease caused by smoking is reduced by half. After 15 years of abstinence, the risk is similar to that for people who've never smoked.
- In 5 to 15 years, the risk of stroke for ex-smokers returns to the level of those who've never smoked.

- Male smokers who quit between ages 35 to 39 add an average of 5 years to their lives. Female quitters in this age group add 3 years. Men and women who quit at ages 65 to 69 increase their life expectancy by 1 year.

More than four in five smokers say they want to quit. And each year about 1.3 million smokers do quit. With good smoking cessation programs, 20 to 40 percent of participants are able to quit smoking and stay off cigarettes for at least one year. Combining interventions such as physician advice and follow-up with nicotine gum and behavior modification may increase success rates. Smoking cessation programs seem especially helpful for people who smoke more than 25 cigarettes a day.

AHA Advocacy Position

The American Heart Association continues to advocate that adequate resources be provided for tobacco cessation programs. Adequate resources also must be provided for the 2000 revision of the smoking cessation guidelines developed by the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research. While prevention programs may be able to prevent new smokers from ever becoming addicted to nicotine, 10–12 million current smokers will die from tobacco-related diseases unless treatment efforts are increased. Tobacco-use cessation or treatment programs offer the best hope for helping these people.